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THE GOSPEL AND ITS TRIBUTARIES

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THE GOSPEL AND ITS TRIBUTARIES

BY

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NEW YORK

*The Kerr Lectures delivered in the United
Free Church College, Glasgow, during the
Session* 1927–28

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1930

PUBLISHED APRIL 1929
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
NEW YORK
T. & T. CLARK
EDINBURGH

PREFACE

The study of Christian origins during the last century has passed through two well-marked phases. Attention was directed in the earlier period to the inner development of the primitive Church. The New Testament writings were critically examined with a view to establishing their date and authorship and purpose, their relation to one another and to Christian practice and doctrine. This field of inquiry has not yet by any means been fully explored, but it has opened out into a far wider one. It has been discovered that the new movement was affected, at almost every point, by the general life of the age, and that many conceptions which were formerly regarded as purely Christian have their affinities in contemporary religion and philosophy. The investigation of these alien sources of Christian thought has been eagerly pressed forward in recent years by a host of scholars, some of whom have built far-reaching conclusions on very slender evidence, while others are too obviously bent on discrediting the Christian message by identifying it with one type or another of ancient superstition. These extravagances must not be taken too seriously. Every new instrument for the better understanding of our religion has at first been used as a weapon against it. One has only to recall how the literary criticism which has done so much to establish the Bible on a surer basis was supposed, a generation ago, to have undermined its authority. We cannot doubt that the later inquiry, when the first shock of novelty has worn off, will prove like the earlier one to have had a positive value for faith. This, indeed, is already apparent. It is much, for one thing, that old systems of thought have won a new significance, now that we can see them reflected in some of our cardinal Christian beliefs. All higher appreciation of man's quest for truth in past ages means an increase to our spiritual inheritance. But our estimate of Christianity itself will be enhanced in the long run by the new light thrown on its beginnings. When we learn to relate it not merely to the life of one particular race, but to the needs and aspirations which have found utterance in many religions, we get a new sense of its universal appeal. When we can discriminate those elements which were given to it from without, we grow more alive to its peculiar message.

The attempt is made in the present book to trace out the double process in the growth of our religion, with a special emphasis on the creative power of those ideas which were inherent in itself. In much of the modern work this aspect of the subject has been strangely neglected. The treatment is concerned wholly with sources and influence, and an impression is left on us that the new religion was compounded of old materials and had nothing of its own to give. Such a view, on the face of it, is contrary to fact. Christianity has always been the most distinctive of all religions. Through the manifold changes it has undergone during two thousand years it has preserved an unmistakable character, and while borrowing incessantly has placed its own impress on all that it has borrowed. Conceptions which had previously been ineffectual have at once been filled with the breath of life when they were taken up into Christianity. It is plain that in the new message there was something which was not derived from any alien source, and that this native factor was the essential one. Nothing that the gospel received is comparable for a moment to that which it gave.

My aim in the book has been to indicate how Christianity drew into itself many tributary elements, and in so doing transformed them, so that the result was not some nondescript composite religion, but a new and in some ways more adequate expression of the message of Jesus. The survey is limited to the period covered by the New Testament. My first intention was to extend it to the time of the Council of Nicæa, for it was in the second and third centuries that the fusion of Christian belief with contemporary thought was carried fully into effect. But the traditional view of the New Testament as complete in itself is not wholly artificial. In that first century the gospel was formulated, the forces which were to modify it came definitely into play, the task which lay before it was clearly envisaged. The subsequent period only wrote out again in larger characters what may be read in the New Testament.

The study of foreign influence on Christianity was hardly begun until about fifty years ago, but it has already produced a vast literature. On this I have drawn so continually that it has been impossible to note my obligations in detail. My gratitude is due not only to previous writers but to several of my colleagues, and especially to Professor J. E. Frame, with whom I have discussed most of the problems which are considered in the book. To the late William Morgan, Professor in Queen's Theological College, Canada, I owe a debt, accumulated through thirty years of the closest friendship, which cannot be measured. His work on "The Religion and Theology of Paul" is one of the outstanding volumes of the Kerr Lectureship. In adding my own contribution to the series I am proud to have my name associated with that of my dear friend.

E. F. SCOTT.

New York,
October 1928.

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THE GOSPEL AND ITS TRIBUTARIES

CHAPTER I

OLD AND NEW IN THE GOSPEL

THERE have always been two views as to the nature of Christianity. They might seem at first sight to be contradictory, and the whole emphasis has usually been laid on one or the other of them. Yet they are both valid, and need to be taken together before we can rightly understand the aim and character of our religion.

It has been regarded, on the one hand, as a new revelation. Jesus himself was confident that he had brought something to men which they had not possessed before, and it was with this assurance that he entered on his mission. He contrasted his new commandments with those which had been given "to them of old time." He declared that many prophets had desired to see the things which men now saw and had not seen then. He drew a clear line of division between the period which had closed with John the Baptist and that which had now begun. Everywhere his teaching glows with the conviction that he speaks directly from God, and that with him the promised age is dawning. This same conviction is reflected on every page of the New Testament, and imparts to the book its incomparable ardour and freshness. Paul is never weary of extolling the newness of the Christian message. He can compare it to nothing else than the birth of light out of the primeval darkness. He feels that with the coming of Christ old things have passed away and all things have become new. The writer of Hebrews is conscious that all previous knowledge of God was dim and fragmentary : God has at last spoken in His Son. For the Fourth Evangelist Christ is the Word made flesh, the manifestation of the hidden God, the true Light now coming into the world. So all the New Testament writings bear witness to the wonder and rapture which the gospel awakened in the first believers. They were acquainted, as we cannot be, with all that the existing religions could offer them. Yet Paul, the Pharisee, was alive to the difference between this message and Judaism. The Fourth Evangelist and the writer to the Hebrews, versed as they were in Hellenistic doctrine, never doubted that in Christ they had attained to a new knowledge. And it was not believers only who were impressed with the newness of the gospel. The widespread suspicion of Christianity in the early days was due, above all else, to the feeling that it was utterly strange. Other religions could be accounted for and classified, but this one was mysterious, and stood all by itself. In a well-known passage of the Epistle to Diognetus the Pagan reader is conceived as asking "what this thing is—this sect or interest which has come new into human experience, now and not before."[1] That sense of bewilderment in the presence of a great innovation, which had reversed all current ideas of worship, was apparently the prevailing one when Christianity first appeared. It has long worn off, and the religion once so strange has become part of our daily life, and we sometimes think of its teaching as obvious and out of date. Yet its nature is still that of a revelation. Ever and again the man who has known it all his life becomes suddenly aware that it is new and marvellous. He finds himself dazzled, like the Apostle, with a great light from heaven.

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[1] *Ep. ad Diogn.* i.

On the other hand, Christianity has been viewed as nothing else than the final phase in a long process of development. For more than a thousand years men had been advancing towards higher spiritual conceptions, and the time had arrived when this age-long travail, on the part of Hebrew and Greek and Oriental thinkers, came to fruition. What seemed a new religion was only the combination, under peculiar conditions, of all the spiritual gains of the ancient world. This view has been strongly emphasised in our own time. The Christian beliefs have been examined one by one, and traced back to earlier speculation. It has been shown that almost everything in the religion had in some manner been anticipated, and that the old idea of a revelation must now be abandoned. This discovery that the gospel contained little that was definitely new has often been hailed as one of the triumphs of modern inquiry; but in substance it was made long ago. Jesus himself declared that he came not to destroy but to fulfil, and his followers were at first unaware that he had inaugurated a new religion. They took for granted that he had only perfected the faith of Israel, and searched the Scriptures, more anxiously than any modern critic, for anticipations of everything he had taught. With the advance of the Gentile mission this idea of the gospel as a consummation took a wider range. It was maintained that not only the hopes of the prophets but all the questionings of Greek poets and thinkers had found their answer in Christ. Already in the Fourth Gospel we hear of a "light which lighteth every man," and this idea is worked out in systematic fashion by the Apologists and the Alexandrian Fathers. They think of Christ as the crowning manifestation of the Logos, who had ever been the leader and educator of the human race. Christianity is the final philosophy. The great thinkers of the past were instruments in that work of revelation which has now been brought to its fulfilment. "Whatever things," says Justin, "which have been rightly said among men belong by right to us Christians." [1]

Our religion, then, has always presented these two aspects, although one or the other of them has usually been left out of sight. The emphasis has been thrown, for the most part, on the absolute newness of the gospel. Any suggestion that it was indebted to previous thought has been resented, as a slur on its divine character. An exception, to be sure, is always made in favour of the Old Testament, which may be treated as essentially a Christian book. Broad-minded scholars have even allowed a place to later Judaism, which was on a different level from Scripture but was an outflow of the same stream of revelation. But that Christianity could have been touched by any influence outside of the charmed circle of Jewish religion was vehemently denied, down almost to our own time. Any resemblance between Pagan and Christian thought was set down to coincidence, or to some process of unconscious prophecy. The truth seemed to be self-evident that if Christianity was a revelation it must be wholly different from anything that had gone before. To connect it in any sense with an historical development was to deny its higher origin. This old position, however, has now become untenable. For one thing, the idea of development can no longer be excluded. It dominates all modern thinking, and demands its rights in the religious sphere as in every other. We have grown impatient of any theory which assumes an irruption into the settled order. Every new advance has in some way been prepared for. There is no creation out of nothing, but only an unceasing growth. Again, the closer study of early Christianity has proved beyond all doubt that much of its teaching was inherited. The thought of Jesus was at many points demonstrably akin to that of the apocalyptic writers and the Rabbis. The missionaries of the primitive Church had grown up in the Hellenistic world, and had been affected, more than they knew, by the influences around them. In countless instances their thought was plainly derivative. Undoubted parallels can be found to it in the surviving literature of the time. So the idea of anything distinctively new in Christianity has been abandoned by many modern scholars. Their whole effort is directed to the detection of sources and antecedents, and for every Christian belief and doctrine some kind of analogy has been discovered. We are given to understand that there was nothing original in our religion. It was not a revelation or even a new form of teaching but a composite product—a many-coloured fabric in which all existing modes of thought were woven together.

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[1] *Second Apology*, 13 (the authenticity of this work is doubtful).

For more than a generation now all inquiry into Christian origins has been based on the so-called historical method, which claims to be the only one that has a scientific right. In a sense the claim is justified. The older methods were arbitrary, and could not possibly lead to any assured results. For instance the allegorical method, which held the field for centuries, treated the Bible as a cryptic book, always conveying some other than its apparent sense. This was a pure assumption, and on the face of it a highly doubtful one. But that everything in the present is linked up with the past is an incontrovertible fact. The scholar who tries to interpret the New Testament from its historical antecedents is taking no liberty, but is only applying in one particular domain a law which is universally valid. In the physical world this law of continuity, of the production of each form of life from one that preceded it, has never been known to fail. In the history of art the final masterpiece is always the consummation of a long endeavour. In philosophy we find each successive thinker taking up the ideas of his predecessor and carrying them a stage further. The same principle may reasonably be assumed to hold good in religion. In the case of each New Testament belief we have the right to ask what went before it, what suggestions of it were already present in earlier thought. Nevertheless, the limitations of this historical method are becoming more and more apparent, and a reaction against it is visibly setting in. We are coming to see that even in the physical sphere growth is something more than the automatic unfolding of what was already there. Some force has been at work which cannot be accounted for, and which acts creatively on what is given. Much less can spiritual phenomena be wholly explained from their antecedents. It may be shown conclusively that a great invention or discovery has been long on its way ; all the materials were ready, and had only to be put together in order to give us the steam-engine or the law of gravitation. Yet this final result would not have come of its own accord. We can truly say that Newton and Watt originated, although in a sense they only combined the data. And on the higher levels of spiritual achievement there can be no automatic growth. In the case of a scientific or social or political advance it is possible to argue that when everything is ready the effect is bound to follow. Often it is difficult to tell which one of many workers should have the credit for the final outcome. The idea, as we say, is in the air, and some accident determines who will be the first to seize and perfect it. But in the purely spiritual sphere it is different. The whole intellectual life of the Middle Ages went to the making of the *Divine Comedy*; everything, it may be said, was given—the language, the poetic forms, the philosophical and political and religious ideas. Yet indubitably, if Dante had not appeared, the poem would never have been written. Great works of art or systems of thought do not produce themselves. The conditions may be fully prepared, the innumerable smaller men may all have done their part, but without the creative mind there will be no result. In the last century Carlyle and Emerson, to mention only these two, taught us the indispensable value of the great personalities, but the lesson has been too quickly forgotten. This is partly due to the growing acceptance, in every department of thought, of the doctrine of evolution, with its belief in an inevitable progress. Partly it may be set down to the tyranny of the democratic idea. We have come to put all our trust in mass movements. We take for granted that the real hero in the advancement of the race is the average man, whom we sometimes elevate almost to the rank of a divinity. Some of our recent historians have made a point of thrusting all the great characters into the background. They tell us that exceptional individuals are only symbols of the general movement, or at most provide a voice to the aspirations of the dumb yet all-controlling multitude. But it is more than doubtful whether the revolving of commonplace ideas in millions of ordinary minds will ever of itself produce great thought. This must always spring from some creative personality. Much can be explained from the study of vague influences, working on the general mass, but at the beginning of a great movement there must always be the man sent from God.

So there is a growing dissatisfaction at the present time with the purely historical method. We are coming to realise that a nation or an institution or an art or literature does not develop by some mechanical process. Our conception of it is more often blurred than enlightened by antiquarian research into its distant origins. Indeed, we are now in danger of an undue neglect of historical causes. It is assumed on every hand that existing systems can be altered or destroyed without any regard to that past experience in which they have their foundations. None the less it is a sound instinct which leads the ordinary man to judge of facts as they are. However they have come to be, they have a character of their own. Our estimate of their value ought not to be confused by too much attention to the processes which may have gone to their making. This healthy instinct by which we allow ourselves to be guided in all other spheres is too often distrusted when we come to religion. It is only within the last century that any account was taken of the historical background of Christianity, and the minds of scholars have naturally been preoccupied with this new field of investigation. The impression is left on us by numberless recent books that our religion was the outcome of a series of historical accidents. It had nothing of its own to contribute. It was put together by ingenious borrowing, or came into being at haphazard by the merging of various streams of influence. One could name commentaries and theological handbooks in which hardly any notice is taken of the actual thought of Paul or John. Nothing is given us but a chaotic mass of analogies and parallel passages, which is supposed, by some strange chemistry, to have distilled itself into the New Testament teaching. Now it cannot be denied that this mode of inquiry has its place. What Paul or John contributed cannot be ascertained until we know the materials which were given them. Yet their own contribution is surely worth considering; it is, in fact, the one thing we want to know. Sometimes it is told us for our comfort that nothing would be lost even if criticism should prove that everything in the New Testament is borrowed. The worth of our religion has nothing to do with its originality. So long as the teaching of Jesus is true and helpful it does not matter whether he merely revised the traditional Jewish ideas. Paul did an inestimable service even though it may have consisted in nothing more than in transmitting and simplifying the truth discerned by Greek and Oriental thinkers. Yet Christian sentiment rightly feels that when our religion is thus resolved into a medley of borrowed ideas it is somehow impoverished. Its power is bound up with the conviction that it is not the "wisdom of men" but an immediate revelation. Now, as in the first days, we crave for a message which comes to us new, out of the very mind of God.

In all times, therefore, there have been two views of the gospel, and it is commonly taken for granted that they are mutually exclusive. If Christianity was borrowed, it loses its title to be considered a revelation. If it was in truth a new message, it must be sharply separated from everything that lay in the past. But this does not follow. It is possible to admit that the religion had behind it a process of historical development, and yet to recognise that it was a new creation. The two views are not incompatible, but serve to complete and illuminate one another. The more we understand what Christianity received, the more clearly we discern what it gave. It worked on materials already prepared for it, and yet transformed them into something different by a power which resided in itself. The purpose of these chapters is to determine, in some degree, how the two factors worked together—how the gospel was at once the result of a long development and a new revelation.

That something new entered the world with the Christian message it is impossible to deny. The evidence is to be found written large on the face of history, and against this palpable evidence all the arguments founded on subtle analysis are futile. We are told, for instance, that Jesus taught nothing but a modified Judaism. In the interest of this view the Rabbinical literature has been minutely sifted, and some parallel has been found for almost every gospel saying, every Christian belief. Practically nothing is left which can be claimed as distinctively Christian. Yet the fact remains that Judaism was never more than the religion of a particular race. There is no ground for believing that it could ever have become anything else. For centuries it had its chance, for the Jewish people were widely scattered, and were eager to proselytise; but their success was negligible. Even among the Jews themselves the religion failed, on the whole, of its purpose. The great mass of the people were unable to practise it except imperfectly. Pharisaism, in which it assumed its typical form, was a confession that it could only become the religion of a select few. The religion of Jesus, on the other hand, had hardly been a generation before the world when it began to draw men with an irresistible attraction. Unlike Judaism, which had the prestige of high antiquity and was associated with a famous nation, it had everything against it. Its adherents were mostly among the poor and ignorant, it was notoriously of recent origin, its Founder had died as a malefactor. Yet, in spite of all, it moved men with a mysterious power. It filled them with an unquenchable confidence that they had now attained to redemption and fellowship with God. As time went on, it transformed the whole life of the world and gave a new direction to all thought. How did it accomplish all this, which had lain so utterly beyond the reach of Judaism? There must have been something in this religion which Judaism had not, some entirely new power.

Again, it has been held that Christianity was an adaptation of certain Eastern cults. Like them it offered a redemption, and taught a number of mystical doctrines. The sacraments it enjoined had close analogies in the practice of the cults. It has sometimes been asserted that, if the world had not become Christian, a religion essentially the same would have grown up out of the worship of Mithra or Serapis. Such judgments of what might have happened are always foolish, and in this case they have no ground whatever. Little is known of the Oriental cults, and there is every sign that their religious value and the extent of their appeal have been wildly exaggerated. Their adherents were never more than small coteries, meeting here and there in tiny chapels, and by their nature they were incapable of gaining a much wider response. They depended for their attraction on the element of mystery, and their secrets would have lost value if they had been generally divulged. There is no indication that they had any profound effect on their votaries. No instance is known of any great thinker or public benefactor or conspicuous saint who drew his inspiration from these cults. What they utterly failed to do was accomplished by Christianity It made its appeal to all races and classes ; it produced lives, from the very beginning, which impressed even enemies by their spiritual grandeur. Whence came the difference ? It is not enough to say that Christianity, by a happy conjunction of circumstances, was more successful than the competing religions. It must have possessed something which the others lacked. Whatever it shared with them it had elements peculiar to itself, and in these lay the secret of its strength.

There have been many attempts to single out these new and distinctive elements of Christianity. They used formerly to be identified with certain doctrines, and lists were drawn up from time to time of what were called the "essentials," the five or six articles of belief on which everything was supposed to hang. These were selected differently in each generation, and in each section of the Church ; and when we examine them in the light of modern knowledge we find, for the most part, that they were not original with Christianity No doubt, when it adopted them, it filled them with a new significance, but the springs of the religion must be sought behind the doctrines, not in them. In our own time the emphasis is usually laid on the moral and social teachings of the gospel. Jesus proclaimed a new righteousness. He destroyed the false ethical ideals of his day, and sought to establish man's life on the principles of love, goodness, forgiveness. For the first time he asserted the rights of the poor and lowly, and pointed the way to a universal brotherhood. The Christian beliefs, we are told, are only the vehicle and safeguard of these ethical demands which constitute the true meaning of the religion. That they are indeed primary no one will deny ; but here again it may be urged that the Christian ethic was not distinctively new. It was first set forth in clear and unmistakable terms in the Sermon on the Mount, but most of its principles had been anticipated not only in the Old Testament, but by the more enlightened Pagan thinkers. When the gospel is conceived purely as a moral system it is difficult to understand why it impressed the world with its newness, and why it triumphed where the older systems had failed. As there was something behind the doctrines, so there must have been something behind the ethic. What was this factor which was entirely new, and in which we must seek for the peculiar gift of Christianity ? It was something intensely real, and yet it cannot be summed up in any formal definition. Perhaps the only adequate account of it is that which is given by the New Testament writers when they speak repeatedly of "the power of the gospel." They felt that the newness of the message consisted not so much in anything it taught as in this power which accompanied it. Men were now enabled actually to *do* the things which they had hitherto dreamed of. The higher life, as it had long been imagined by sages and prophets, was now made possible to men.

We must be careful, certainly, not to conceive of this power in a merely abstract way. There are many writers and preachers who speak vaguely of the power of the gospel as if it were quite distinct from its content. They seem to believe, if indeed they have thought out their ideas at all, that the gospel carries with it a mysterious energy which of itself uplifts and regenerates. It may justly be argued that there is no such thing as this occult power. The power of an idea depends on its intrinsic truth ; the power of a man's personality is one with his sincerity, his kindness and justice and wisdom, his devotion to noble aims. In like manner the power of Christianity is bound up with its moral and spiritual teaching. When we try to regard it as something existing by itself we are left with nothing but an empty word. Yet this does not mean that the whole content of the gospel is exhausted when its teaching about God and the duty of man is set forth in a number of propositions. There is something given along with the mere knowledge, and it is this which the New Testament writers are thinking of when they speak of power. Is it not true that in all enlargement of our knowledge there is something given which is more in value than the knowledge itself ? When Cortes and his men stood on the peak and " looked on each other with a wild surmise," they were not thinking merely that a vexed question in geography had now been settled. They were thrilled with the sense that man's world had been suddenly widened—that he had won a new outlook and a new mastery—that his life had been set in larger relations. The higher the plane of knowledge, the more value attaches to this accompaniment, and in the highest knowledge of all it becomes well-nigh everything. For instance, when the author of 2 Timothy says that Christ brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, he thinks not so much of the knowledge imparted as of all that this amazing new knowledge involves—the significance that it gives to human life, the faith and hope and courage which are now awakened in us. It was thus that Christianity was a power. The truth was made known in the sense that it could be realized as the truth and so work mightily in the hearts of men. In itself it might be old, but it was now brought home in such a manner that it gave that thrill and impulse without which all knowledge is meaningless. We think of Christ as the revealer of God, but the objection is sometimes raised that he taught no new doctrine about God. He merely took over, in the fullest extent of its meaning, the prophetic conception of the merciful and righteous God. But he changed this conception into a reality. He made it possible for men to lay hold of it with an absolute confidence. They had now the exultant sense that the old surmises had come true, and that they might trust in God as in their Heavenly Father. This was the revelation. It did not consist in the divulging of some hidden knowledge, but in the vitalising of things already known. These truths were revealed inasmuch as they were now made real and operative for the first time.

Two things, therefore, have to be distinguished in the Christian message, although they are so fused together that they cannot well be separated. It consisted, on the one hand, in a certain teaching about the nature of God and His purpose with men and the service He requires. This teaching, the more we examine it, is found to contain the essential principles of all religion, and for this reason affords many points of contact with earlier types of faith. Men had always been aware, in some fashion, of these fundamental truths. Many of them had already found memorable expression, in word or symbol, centuries before the time of Christ. But, on the other hand, the gospel was with power. The truths it dealt with were not presented by way of theory and speculation. Something was added which made them vital. Men could feel that their eyes were suddenly opened. They were made conscious that what had hitherto been fancies or pious commonplaces were the supreme realities. The higher good which they had hardly dared to imagine was now brought within their reach. It was in this sense that the gospel was a revelation. If the word is taken to mean the disclosing of novel ideas, it is not difficult to show that Jesus revealed little. By similar reasoning it might be proved that no thinker or discoverer has ever contributed anything that was really new. Every great idea has in some degree been foreshadowed. But there is a world of difference between the truth which is only guessed at and that which stands out indubitably as the truth. We reserve the name of discoverer to the man who transforms the mere idea into a certainty, on which all later thought and action can be securely founded. It was thus that the gospel was a revelation. Truths which were in themselves old were now invested with a new sanction. They were brought home with a convincing power, so that they henceforth became the grand certainties and the moving forces in human life.

From the beginning, therefore, our religion gathered into itself elements from many quarters, and in this respect it followed the general law of all development. Everything that comes into being grows out of the past, and carries the past along with it. An invention may be new, so much so that it revolutionises all the conditions of life, yet it involves a long preparation. It brings to a head the labour of ages, right on from the discovery of fire and metals. In every new advance there must be this relation to the past, and most of all in the sphere of religion; for religion has little meaning unless it answers to what is broadest and deepest in man's experience. We hold a poor conception of Christianity when we try to make out that it was entirely new, displacing all previous beliefs and moral standards and ideas of God. Men had always been seeking after God. They had been learning the true principles of life through the labour and sorrow of thousands of years. If Jesus had taught something which had never occurred to any mind before him, this would only have meant that his teaching was arbitrary and fantastic. Now and then some cult arises which breaks away completely from all known beliefs and accepted moralities. We do not on that account set it down to revelation, but simply to mental derangement. A religion has value just in the proportion that it answers to instincts which every one possesses, and gives form and body to ideas that have always been dimly present. So it is the grand evidence for Christianity that wherever it is taught men are able to say, "This is not new; the best that we have learned hitherto agrees with this; in our own lives we have had glimpses of this truth." In India, China, Africa, the gospel has found points of attachment. All around us the most ignorant men and women discern something in it to which they can respond. No form of criticism is more futile than that which seeks to disparage it because some of its beliefs have their affinities in alien and even in savage religions. This only signifies that its roots are fixed deep in all human experience and in the very constitution of man's mind. Because it thus relates itself to what is universal and has always been we can have confidence that it is true.

It may be freely admitted, then, that Christianity was grounded in earlier religions, and could not, by its nature, be otherwise. But there were specific reasons which made it from the outset a borrowing religion. We shall have to consider them more fully in the later discussion, but it will be well at this stage to indicate two of them which were of primary importance.

(1) In the first place, it was necessary to provide an intellectual framework for the new message. Jesus himself had taught no theology. He had proclaimed the will of God in such a manner that henceforth it became the controlling power in human life; but he never sought to co-ordinate his teaching into a rational system. It has proved impossible ever since to explain the meaning of Christianity by any set formulæ. In this respect it is like beauty, poetry, music, which have a character there is no mistaking, although all the attempts to define them are felt to miss out the essential thing. So the meaning of Christianity was perfectly clear from the first. The disciples were conscious of the change that had been wrought in them, but how were they to describe it? How were they to communicate the message so that it might work with a like power in others? This has always been the dilemma of Christianity. It cannot be explained in terms of reason, and yet man is a rational being, who must needs state to himself in logical fashion the truths he lives by. Faced with this necessity, the

disciples were obliged to throw their faith into doctrinal forms, and they had no choice but to fall back on those provided by their time. They examined the new religion in the light of the Old Testament, of the apocalyptic tradition, of the current philosophy, and in this manner construed an account of it which was satisfactory to the mind of the age. Christianity, in its historical form, represents the mingling of the original revelation with all this alien material, taken over from earlier thought and tradition. In former days the whole composite mass was accepted as the gospel. Now we have learned to investigate and sift it, and are trying, by this critical labour, to get behind the doctrinal construction to what may be regarded as essentially Christian. But this will never be possible beyond a certain point. The message and the interpretation are so closely interwoven that we are in danger of losing the one when we discard the other. Even if it were possible to free our religion wholly from those forms of thought which it borrowed, we may well doubt whether this would be desirable. Sooner or later religious ideas must be formulated in terms of doctrine, and with all their shortcomings those conceptions of which the early Church availed itself were wonderfully fitted to its purpose. They summed up the results of ages of earnest thinking about the highest things, and by rescuing and maintaining them Christianity performed a priceless service. It must not be forgotten, too, that the gospel itself reacted on the forms which it borrowed. They cannot be thrown aside as Jewish or Pagan, for they are now so impregnated with the Christian ideas that they have become in a real sense Christian. Many foolish things are said to-day about disentangling the gospel from the ancient doctrines. These, to be sure, do not constitute the gospel, but they are the framework without which it would fall to pieces.

(2) Again, with the advance of its mission the Church was confronted with a further difficulty. Jesus had inherited the Jewish beliefs, and had made use of them in so far as he had tried himself to explain his message. But by its nature it was universal, and immediately after his death it began to find its way into the wider world. In the course of this Gentile mission it became necessary to exchange the Jewish forms of thought for others which were more congenial to the Western mind. The view has often been put forward that in this process the gospel suffered a fatal perversion. Jesus was the successor of the Prophets and the Rabbis. When he was adopted by the West he was transformed into a philosopher or into a divinity ; the whole purport of his work was changed. We shall have occasion to examine this theory from various points of view. So far from accepting it, we shall find reason to conclude that the Gentiles, in some respects, discovered the real aim of Jesus. His own disciples were misled by the Jewish forms of the message, and failed to perceive what lay beneath them. The Gentiles responded to that which was not Jewish but universal. It was their very effort to apprehend what was new and distinctive in the gospel which led them to interpret it by means of different conceptions. To some extent the process was a conscious one, analogous to that by which the modern missionary connects the Christian teaching with that of Confucianism or Hinduism. To a much greater extent it was unconscious. From the time of Paul onward the missionaries were chiefly drawn from the Hellenistic world. They were still

for the most part Jews, but had been trained amidst Gentile influences; they had learned to regard the great problems of life and religion from the Gentile point of view. In their exposition of the gospel they employed ideas which had become even more vital to their own thinking than those of Judaism. As a result the Christian teaching underwent a profound modification. It is not difficult to argue that Paul and the Fourth Evangelist, while they adhere in form to the primitive gospel, have inwardly broken with it, and in the name of Jesus carry on the work of Hellenistic speculation. But we discover, on a deeper analysis, that the very opposite is true. With all their Gentile thinking the Christian teachers have never lost their hold of the primary truths of the gospel. Their whole aim is to assert those truths in a manner which they deem satisfying. If any proof were needed of the intrinsic power and vitality of the gospel, it may be found in this—that while it borrowed from the alien culture it was never submerged. Whatever was given to it was pressed into its own service and became a real part of itself.

Our religion appeared at a particular time in history, and was subject to historical conditions. It came through the channels prepared for it in Judaism, and was shaped by the philosophies and beliefs which were prevalent in the first century throughout the Roman Empire. Much that we have been accustomed to regard as truth eternally valid might appear, on examination, to be nothing but the accidental product of a given development. One may imagine the early missionaries turning to the East instead of to the West. If they had planted the gospel in Persia or India, it would have grown up under influences entirely different, and its doctrines, we can well believe, would have had little in common with those we hold to-day. Yet it cannot be admitted that Christianity, as we know it, is merely the outcome of historical accident. Supposing that it had developed in Persia or India, would it have been essentially different ? It would certainly have formed for itself other modes of expression, but at the heart of it there is something which constitutes the revelation. Under all imaginable conditions this would have remained the same. There are forms of life which exhibit wide variations in the several continents, and the superficial observer will take for granted that they are different species. But the botanist or biologist can recognise the same type. The essential structure has never varied : ages of exposure to widely diverse influences have changed nothing but a few external things. So in Christianity we can distinguish between what was given and what was received. Much was due to the historical process ; it might almost appear at first sight that this accounts for everything. But behind it there was the revelation, the living power. This has persisted through all the changes. This, and not the modifications which have come in from time to time, is Christianity.

CHAPTER II

THE JEWISH INHERITANCE

CHRISTIANITY had its roots in Judaism, and to the Jewish influence it owed incomparably more than to any other. Until the early years of the present century this was never doubted, but we have now grown aware that it was a serious error to think of Judaism as the only formative influence in the new religion. Many scholars, in their eagerness to do justice to the neglected factors, have been tempted to make them everything. They have maintained that in the course of the Gentile mission Christianity broke entirely with its Jewish antecedents and became a religion of purely Hellenistic type. It needs to be insisted that such a theory is in conflict with the patent facts. Jesus was born a Jew, and worked solely among his own people. His Apostles, even when they were drawn from the Hellenistic world, were of Jewish ancestry and training. For more than a century the Old Testament was the Bible of the Church; the Synagogue supplied the model for its worship. The name by which the Christian community called itself was the New Israel, and it counted, in the eyes of the world, as an erratic Jewish sect.

That Christianity grew out of Judaism cannot be questioned, but one fact needs always to be kept in mind. Judaism in the time of Christ was itself a highly composite religion. As we see it now, it stands out as the grand example of a religion which has clung to its own traditions and denied an entrance to any extraneous elements. It has disowned those products even of Jewish thought which happened to be written in the Greek language, or drew their inspiration from other sources than the Mosaic Law. We are apt to take for granted that this exclusiveness had always been part of its nature ; but the truth is that throughout its earlier history it had been hospitable, in an exceptional degree, to outside influences. The religion inherited by Jesus had gathered into itself elements which related it to almost all the religions of the ancient world. Palestine, by the very fact of its geographical position, was the meeting-place of many streams of culture, and the Old Testament affords us a vivid picture of many-sided intercourse with the petty kingdoms round about, and with Syria, Egypt, Phœnicia, Assyria, Babylon. This intercourse was not merely commercial or political. The Prophets are always lamenting that Israel has embraced the customs and idolatries of the heathen. Their chief effort is directed to preserving the native religion from these contaminations. The impression left on us by countless passages is that of a volatile people, more prone than others to be carried away by suggestions from without. "Hath a nation changed their gods, which yet are no gods ? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit."[1] In the later Old Testament period and the age that followed this process went still further. The exiles in Babylon were exposed directly to the seductions of a venerable cult, and after the restoration Palestine was long a province within the Persian Empire. It was doubtless in these centuries that Judaism was powerfully affected by the Persian religion, perhaps the noblest of all the rival types of faith. With Alexander's conquest the Greek civilisation spread over the East, and the Jews were yielding to it like the other races when the movement was forcibly arrested by the Maccabæan war. It was now perceived that the facile adoption of foreign customs had placed the national religion in deadly peril, and the effort was begun to "build a fence around the Law." But by this time it was too late. Ideas from many foreign sources had been woven into Judaism, and counted henceforth as an integral part of it.

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[1] Jer. ii. 11.

The religion of Israel, therefore, had been incessantly borrowing for many centuries. Modern analysis has made out that much of the earliest ritual was of native Canaanite origin. Babylonian conceptions have been detected in the prophetic literature, while the imagery of the apocalyptic writings is very largely Persian. The Greek influence cannot be traced with any certainty in the Old Testament books, but in the Judaism which arose outside of Palestine it is all-pervasive. This composite nature of the parent religion must never be forgotten when we study the early history of Christianity. It might seem at first sight inexplicable that a religion of Jewish origin should have taken on a Hellenistic character, almost in the course of a single lifetime. No single theory is fully adequate to account for this transformation. But it needs to be noted that between Judaism and the alien religions there was not the impassable gulf which has often been assumed. The very fact that it was grounded in Judaism enabled Christianity to establish points of contact with many of the prevailing beliefs. To an extent which no one suspected Judaism had borrowed, and when the Apostles carried their message to the outside world they found much in Pagan worship and speculation which was also Jewish. For ages these ideas had been incorporated in Judaism, and their ancestry had been completely forgotten. But the likeness was still apparent, and from beliefs which were thus common to Jews and Gentiles the mission could take its departure.

But while Judaism had derived largely from alien sources it had always been identified with certain principles which gave it a strongly marked character of its own. It may be said, indeed, that the same process which can be traced in the history of Christianity had in some measure been anticipated in Judaism. While borrowing freely from many sides it had forces inherent in itself by which it mastered and wrought into its own substance all that came to it from without. It has been the fatal error of much modern scholarship to assume that borrowed Old Testament ideas must be explained in the light of their origin. On this principle the key to some of the greatest utterances in the Psalms and Prophets has been sought in primitive nature-worship, or in Babylonian legend and mythology. But a foreign belief which has been assimilated into a living religion is always changed into something different. This is peculiarly true of Hebrew religion, which more than any other in the ancient world had a distinctive character. At the heart of it there were certain great conceptions, intensely realised, which absorbed and refashioned everything that was given.

The Jews themselves, with all their inclination to foreign customs, were proudly aware of this dominating quality in their own religion. They claimed that to them, as to His chosen people, God had made a unique revelation. In the very passage where he declares that

God is Spirit and that the true worshippers may meet Him everywhere, the Fourth Evangelist is careful to add that "salvation is of the Jews."[1] To all Jewish thinkers it appeared self-evident that, although others may have stumbled on some imperfect knowledge of God, His authentic voice had only been heard in Israel. The minds of many Christians have been troubled, even in our own day, by the discovery that other religions co-operated with Judaism in the moulding of the gospel. In spite of all argument the feeling persists that there was only one genuine stream of revelation. And this feeling is something more than an ancient prejudice. Hebrew religion, even in its more primitive forms, had characteristics which are not to be found in any other. It was rooted in principles which we can now recognise as possessing an absolute worth.

These radical principles which were present from the first in the religion of Israel may be reduced to three: (1) that there is one God; (2) that He is the God of righteousness; (3) that His will in the end must prevail. These beliefs as we first meet with them are dimly apprehended. The one God of Israel is contrasted with heathen gods, who are also credited with a real existence. The righteousness which He upholds is confused with ancient customs and with primitive ideas of vengeance. His ultimate victory is made inseparable from that of His worshippers. Nevertheless, the vital elements of an ethical and monotheistic religion are clearly present. In the earliest surviving literature we can trace the beginnings of these great conceptions.

Many theories have been advanced to account for their origin. They have been derived from some historical accident, or some peculiarity of early custom which turned the religious thinking of the Hebrew people in a given direction. Such mechanical explanations leave the real question unanswered. Great spiritual principles, even in their rudimentary form, can only be discerned by spiritual insight, and the roots of the Hebrew religion must be sought in some peculiar endowment of the Hebrew genius. In a literal sense Israel was a chosen people. Just as some races are gifted in exceptional measure with artistic or political capacities, so this race had the instinct for religion. And the racial endowment which lay dormant, as it always does, in the mass of men, came to its full activity in certain individuals, whose task it was to develop it in the people as a whole. Hebrew tradition preserved the memory of one such teacher, who gave the impulse to all the later movement. The towering figure of Moses is wrapt in darkness ; almost everything in his legend has been called in question by modern inquiry. But it may be said that, even if his name had been entirely lost, it would have been necessary to postulate such a figure. There can be no beginning to a great spiritual advance except through a personality. If Israel discovered the path towards a true knowledge of God, it must have followed the leading of some inspired man.

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[1] John iv. 21, 22.

The name of Moses is associated with those primary convictions which underlay Hebrew religion. It is also associated with a body of customs and ordinances. Like all ancient religions Judaism was ceremonial. Its most remarkable characteristic lay in this—that with all its insistence on ethical and spiritual demands it never ceased to attach an equal value to ceremonial rites.

The ordinances comprised in the ritual may be assigned to various origins. Some of them grew out of the social practices of an early tribal community. Others may be due to the hygienic requirements of a particular climate and mode of life. But for the most part they may be classed as survivals from a primitive phase of religion, and parallels to them have been found among many uncivilised races. It used to be surmised that some of the rites had a hidden symbolic meaning, but this is to misconceive their nature. Intrinsically they have no value, except to illustrate the processes of the human mind in its earliest stages of culture. Taken up, however, into the religion of Israel, they acquired a real significance. For one thing, they became identified with the worship of the one God, and provided a means whereby it could maintain and express itself. Again, they served to weld the people together as a religious community. However they might differ in matters of opinion, all Jews were bound to observe the set customs, and were thus enabled to realise, all through their history, that they were a race apart, consecrated to the service of the true God. Above all, the ordinances helped to enforce on the people the supreme duty of practical obedience. It does not appear that at any time, except in such conscious allegory as we find in Philo, the Jews concerned themselves with the spiritual import of the Mosaic ritual. Their attitude was simply that these were the commands laid down by God. Why they were given or what might be their significance it was not for men to inquire. Enough to know that God, for reasons of His own, had exacted this service from His people. They had the opportunity granted them of proving their devotion to God by the faithful performance of His will.

From the earliest times, then, the ceremonial was bound up indissolubly with the higher demands of

Hebrew religion. We have only to think of the Decalogue, in which the law of the Sabbath stands side by side with the moral requirements and the declaration of the unity of God. Doubtless in the earlier days this blending of the ceremonial and the spiritual elements in the religion was salutary. By long prescription the ritual practices had become sacrosanct. To violate them was to offend mysterious powers which would inflict deadly penalties, and this feeling of awe was now extended to the laws for right living and right worship. Yet the confusion of the lower with the higher requirements was by its nature mischievous. As time went on, it could not but obscure the issues in religious life and thought.

It was the Prophets who first brought clearly to light those primary truths which had always been implicit in the religion of Israel. They perceived that the righteous God whom Israel worshipped must needs be the God of the whole earth. They declared, with a force and splendour which have never been surpassed, that His service must consist in obedience to the moral law. At the same time, it is impossible to accept the sharp distinction which has commonly been drawn between the prophetic and the priestly ideas of religion. The Prophets, we are told, were conscious that the old ceremonial was a mere dead weight which frustrated the true requirements of God. Their aim was to clear away that débris of ancient custom, and rebuild the religion on a purely ethical basis. But this contention is at best only partially true. The Prophets indeed perceive that ritual by itself is of no avail ; they subordinate it to the great ethical demands. Yet they never question its validity as an element in the divine law. They rebuke the people no less for neglect of the observances than for moral shortcomings. The Deuteronomic code, in which the prophetic movement had its outcome, is at pains to regulate the ceremonial and to invest it with yet higher sanctions. We have to recognise that two different strains were always present in Hebrew religion. Neither of them is ever completely overcome by the other.

The Prophets made their stand not so much for an ethical as against a ceremonial worship as for the religion which belonged distinctively to Israel. They lived at a time when it was menaced with destruction. Heathen cults, countenanced by the reigning kings, were making dangerous progress. The very existence of Israel and all that it represented was imperilled by the rising power of Assyria. It was the task of the Prophets to save the religion, and in this endeavour they found themselves constrained to inquire more deeply into its nature. On what basis did it rest? How did it differ from other forms of worship? What was the security that the cause of Jahveh would finally triumph? In answer to such questions the Prophets delivered their message.

They declared that God was One in the sense that He was the living and true God. He reigned not only over Israel but over the world, which He had created and which He governed according to His will. He was a righteous God, and was working through all the changes of history towards a righteous end. He had chosen Israel, not for its own sake, but that it might serve Him in righteousness and so proclaim Him in His true character. For the first time the Prophets arrived at the conception of a moral order to which all other interests were subordinate. The world was God's and He was the righteous God. His cause of righteousness, whatever powers might be arrayed against it, must in the end prevail.

In two respects, however, the Prophets failed to discover the full significance of these principles, inherent in the religion of Israel. (1) On the one hand, they were unable to free themselves from the old belief that God took account not of the individual but of the community. As King of the nation His concern was with the national destinies, and individuals came under His care only as members of the larger whole. It is true that from the time of Isaiah onward a distinction is drawn between the mass of the nation and the Remnant [1]—the righteous few who constitute the true Israel. This distinction, as we shall see, was to prove of cardinal value to early Christianity. In the later prophets, especially in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, we have the beginning of a conception of personal responsibility to God. Yet the prophetic religion, in spite of its approaches towards a deeper view, remains within the confines of the old tribalism. (2) There is a failure, too, to perceive that the national idea is inconsistent with the belief in the one God. He is still regarded as in a peculiar sense the God of Israel. While He makes His favour conditional on Israel's obedience to His law of righteousness, He identifies Himself with this people as with no other. On the basis, however, of this national idea the Prophets build up a magnificent conception which was to dominate all later religious thought. They look forward to a day when the sovereignty of God will be universal. As yet He is King of Israel, but all nations will at last acknowledge Him. The vocation of Israel is to unite the whole earth in service to the true God.

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[1] Isa. i. 9, ix. 3, x. 21.

The Prophets thus carried the traditional religion to an incomparably higher plane. They did not radically change it, but purified and developed it in the light of those principles which had always lain at its centre. In the later time, when the great prophetic impulse had died down, the cruder elements tended to reassert themselves. These had never been discarded even by the Prophets, and among the people generally they had continued to hold the foremost place. After the return from exile a sort of balance was effected between the two sides of the religion. It was recognised that the service of Jahveh was bound up with the sacred customs, and they were brought together in an elaborate code, which was normative henceforth for the religious life. This was combined, at the same time, with the prophetic teaching. The attempt was made to adjust the ethical demands to the ceremonial in such a manner that they should reinforce each other. As a result, Judaism became the religion of the Law.

It was through the struggle for independence, in the second century before Christ, that this new type of Judaism established itself. The Syrian overlord, in his effort to suppress Jewish nationalism, had struck at the traditional customs, and these now became the most cherished possessions of the people. Patriotism and religion, for all pious Jews, were identified with the ordinances of the Law. The emphasis was shifted, too, from the law of worship to that of practice. Hitherto, as we know from the Psalms, the grand object of Jewish devotion was the Temple, with its stated rites and sacrifices. But in the national struggle the priestly aristocracy had sided with the invader; the Temple ceremonies had fallen into disuse; persecution had been directed against the customs prescribed by the Law. These, therefore, came to be regarded as the essential part of Judaism. It was taken for granted that the service of God consisted in scrupulous observance of the Sabbath and of the rules laid down for all the details of daily behaviour. The synagogue, in which these requirements were taught and studied, took the place of the Temple. To all appearance the great house in Jerusalem still continued to be the shrine of Judaism, and its ritual was performed with ever-increasing splendour. But when it finally disappeared with its whole system of feasts and sacrifices, the religion, in its characteristic features, hardly suffered a perceptible change.

In the time of Christ, then, the Jews had become the people of the Law. It was with the Law that Christianity had to wage its first conflict, and the Christian mind has had difficulty, ever since, in appraising it with anything like justice. With its countless prescriptions and prohibitions, entering into every corner of ordinary life, it seems to impose an intolerable burden. We forget that to the Jew, trained to it from his earliest years and living in an environment where it was taken for granted, the Law was a second nature. He accepted it just as the modern civilised man accepts the code of manners. Men have always loved to submit themselves to restrictions which in themselves are arbitrary. The soldier takes a pride in his military habits ; the man of social rank multiplies his conventions of dress and behaviour, and thereby flatters his sense of superiority. For the Jew, likewise, the apparent burden of the Law was a privilege and satisfaction. It reminded him constantly that he belonged to the favoured race, that he was faithful in his duty to God.

We must remember, too, that the observance of the Law had a positive moral value. Its prescriptions might often be meaningless, but the effort to keep them was a discipline in patience and self-mastery. To the legal system, more than to anything else, the Jews owed those qualities which enabled them to hold their own through centuries of hardship. The training of the Law, moreover, involved a habit of self-examination. A standard was set by which a man had always to be trying his conduct, and by so doing he learned to act with a strict conscientiousness, and became aware of his shortcomings. It is easy to make light of those regulations, often paltry and absurd, by which all the minutiæ of daily behaviour were governed under the Law. But the conception of a life mapped out in all its details and subjected to the service of God is in itself a noble one. It was adopted at a later time by the monastic orders and the more earnest forms of Puritanism ; and among those who lived by it have been some of the saintliest men and women whom the world has known. Judaism, too, had its saints, nurtured in the religion of the Law.

Again, the legal system made room in itself for the prophetic teaching. Not only did it combine the ritual prescriptions with the demand for righteousness, but it sought to make the ritual a true means of grace. In no small degree this effort was successful. The Prophets had set forth a lofty theory of the spiritual life, but the Law gave practical effect to it in ordinary conduct. By the keeping of the Sabbath, for example, men were continually reminded that God was holy, and that they must wait upon Him with reverence.

The dietary rules, whatever may have been their original purpose, were now understood in the light of the great conception that Israel, as God's people, must order the whole of life in accordance with His will. The observance of the Law—and this, as has been already indicated, was its chief value—gave a concrete meaning to the idea of obedience. God was the Creator and Sovereign who had an unlimited right to man's service, and in serving Him man was to find his happiness and the one end of his being. Obedience to God was henceforth the watchword of Judaism. The faithful performance of the legal duties, according to the Rabbinical teaching, was to be more than perfunctory. It must give expression, in outward action, to an inward spirit of heartfelt obedience.

Thus the old idea that legal Judaism was an unmeaning yoke, or the blind perversion of a once pure and spiritual religion, has now been generally abandoned. Jewish and Christian scholars have in recent years united in impressing on us the religious value of the Law;[1] and it is well that this tardy justice should be rendered to one of the most memorable attempts to invest man's earthly life with a higher significance. The present danger, indeed, is that of exaggerating the worth of the Law. We are assured, on many hands, that the New Testament criticism of it is based on a complete misunderstanding. Not a few scholars have confidently asserted that all the essential principles of Christianity were contained in the Law, and that Jesus himself must be regarded as a Rabbi, who at most set free the current Judaism from its purely national restrictions. Now it may be granted that the New Testament account of the Law is biased by controversial aims, and is sometimes unduly harsh. Yet on a deeper view we can perceive that it is not only valid, but lays bare, with marvellous penetration, the radical defects of the legal system.

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[1] On the Jewish side the writings of Montefiore, Abrahams, and Schechter are particularly noteworthy. Herford (*Pharisaism*) and Moore, whose great work, *Judaism*, is of primary value, have presented the case for the Law with remarkable insight and sympathy.

(1) In the first place, the Law arose out of the endeavour to preserve, within a spiritual religion, beliefs and practices which had nothing to do with it. No doubt every religion carries into its later history an inheritance from the past—ceremonies, customs, doctrines, which present its teaching under some ancient form that has been outgrown. Survivals of this kind are often a precious possession, and could not be discarded without serious loss. They provide the religion with a symbolism which is all the more impressive because it links the faith of the present with that of a remote past. But the prescriptions of the Law had no such symbolic value. They had not sprung out of the faith of Israel, but were anterior to it. They were nothing more than the figments of early superstition, clinging to a religion of different order. Such alien elements could only obscure the spiritual ideas with which it was sought to blend them. Belief in God's righteousness was vaguely confused with the efficacy of sacrifice. The "weightier matters of the Law" were on the same footing with the rules about tithing or the washing of hands. Not only so, but it always happens when trifles of behaviour are magnified that they become more important than the essential things. The heathen, after his fashion, observed the moral law, while the Jew was proudly conscious that he alone had knowledge of the legal ordinances. Thus he learned to cherish them as his special possession, the vital factor in his religion.

(2) Again, while teaching the supreme duty of obedience to God, the Law made it a matter of outward prescription. All that God required of men He had laid down in a number of definite rules, imposed by authority. Here also it may be granted that in all religions there must be a large element of authority. It cannot be expected of the mass of people that they will think out for themselves, from first principles, a complete scheme of belief and code of action. They will always be content to take over the results which have approved themselves to the faith and experience of former generations. A religion thus given to them out of the past will carry with it a far stronger sanction. Intrinsically, too, it will almost certainly be much nearer to the truth than anything they could attain to by some illumination of their own. Judaism, however, did not merely allow a place to the idea of authority, but was deliberately based on it. The principle was laid down as fundamental that God, in a distant past, had imposed certain commandments to which men were bound to submit. In this sense of an outward compulsion the service of God was grounded. We know, indeed, that among the finer spirits in Judaism obedience to the Law was rendered freely,[1] but in ordinary practice the feeling of constraint was always present. Since the commandments were prescribed, men were careful to offer nothing more than what was strictly necessary. Wherever possible the demands of the Law were minimised, or were avoided altogether by ingenious casuistry. Paul was profoundly right when he argued that the whole method of basing religion

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[1] It is only necessary to recall the saying of Antigonus of Socho (*Pirke 'aboth*): "Be not like servants who obey their lord on condition that they receive a reward; be rather like servants who obey on no condition of reward, and let the fear of God be over you."

on law was a false one. A law is intended to be binding, but invariably fails through its very definiteness. Where everything must be exactly stated there is always something overlooked ; some word or phrase slips into the enactment which is capable of being twisted into a wrong meaning. It was always possible to play fast and loose with the will of God when it was expressed in the form of commandment. Against the Judaism of his day Jesus repeatedly brings the charge that it led to formalism and hypocrisy ; and we cannot doubt that the criticism was substantially just. Certainly it was never meant to include all who governed their lives by the Law, but it exposed one weakness which was inherent in the legal system. The attempt to enforce obedience by a law had destroyed the very spring and motive of true obedience.

(3) Once more, the religion of the Law had its outcome in pride and self-righteousness. It was chiefly on this ground that Jesus condemned the scribes and Pharisees, and Paul likewise dwells on this as the cardinal defect of the Law. Their accusations have often been indignantly denied, but the truth of them appears self-evident. When it was assumed that the whole will of God was comprised in a number of stated rules, men could easily persuade themselves that they had obeyed it perfectly. More sensitive spirits, like Paul and the author of 4 Esdras, were conscious of their failure ; they thought of the Law as holding up to them a divine ideal to which they could never attain. But the ordinary Pharisee looked only to the literal demands of the Law, and was confident that he had left nothing undone. Examining his life in every item by the legal standard, he could honestly declare that he had performed even more than was required of him,

and might lay claim to God's favour as a matter of simple right. Men were thus encouraged in self-complacency and in arrogance towards their less virtuous neighbours. They were blinded to their need of forgiveness. They trusted in their own deserving, and allowed no room for the gracious will of God. The effect of the Law, as Paul perceived, was to create an attitude of mind which was the precise opposite of the true religious temper.

These, according to the New Testament, were the outstanding defects of Judaism, and it is useless to deny their reality. If we had known nothing of them from explicit witness, we might have inferred, from the very nature of the system, that they were inevitable. Yet it would be unfair to blame them wholly on the Law, as expounded by the scribes and Pharisees. They were bound up, in the last resort, with Hebrew religion, of which the Law was the final and characteristic outcome. The scribes did not replace the older religion by a barren traditionalism, but merely gathered up and formulated what they found already existing. Judaism, as they present it, appears to fall short of the prophetic teaching because it has been worked out to its logical issues and has thereby revealed its inner contradictions. The truth is that it was incapable, in its own right, of developing into a world-wide religion of absolute worth. It was essentially the religion of a nation. Its lofty conceptions of the moral nature and universal sovereignty of God are inseparable from the belief that the object of His love is Israel. By this identification of the cause of God with that of His chosen people Hebrew thought is fatally restricted. It is unable to distinguish between the moral law and one particular interest. It never escapes from the limitation which is inherent in a purely national religion. We are sometimes told that this limitation was an accidental one which would gradually have been transcended, and which the Prophets in their greater moments do occasionally transcend. But they never really do so. Their sense of God is never fully separated from their idea of the favoured nation. That this nationalism was in the very substance of the religion is evident from the later history, which plainly contradicts the theory that Judaism was bound, by its own inner forces, to develop in time into something larger. We find, as a matter of fact, that with the progress of religious thought the national consciousness increased in strength. Isaiah, Jeremiah, the Psalmists declare far more emphatically than the earlier writers that the cause of God is one with that of the nation. They interpret the love and righteousness of God in the light of His dealings with Israel. They look for the fulfilment of His Kingdom to a future in which Israel will be delivered and exalted. The later system under which Israel was definitely set apart as the people of the Law was unavoidable. It was, in fact, as the Jews themselves have always insisted, the consummation of the whole previous development. An intense national feeling had always been the driving force behind Hebrew religion. It gave rise in the higher minds to the conception of Israel as God's instrument in the accomplishing of His eternal purpose, but this itself helped to intensify the national idea. Conversion to the Jewish faith always entailed, as a matter of course, incorporation within the Jewish race. It could not be otherwise, for Judaism, in its fundamental character, was the religion of the Jews.

The view has frequently been maintained, and seems to have grown in favour in recent years, that Christianity was nothing but the final stage in an evolution. All its governing conceptions had been matured in the long process of Hebrew thought, but could not come to their own so long as they were confined within the Jewish framework. Nothing was necessary but to liberate them, and it was merely an historical accident that this was effected by Jesus. He happened to appear when the fruit had ripened and could no longer be contained in the husk. But such an estimate of the work of Jesus is simply a trifling with words. The national restrictions of Judaism were not a mere shell or scaffolding which might be thrown off at will. They belonged to the very substance of the religion. The higher conceptions could not be set free from them without destroying the religion altogether. This is clearly perceived by Paul when he thinks of Christianity not as the development but as the antithesis of Judaism. The gospel and the Law, as he regards them, stand for two opposite accounts of God's relation to man. For the true fulfilment of Hebrew religion we must look to Pharisaism, in which the service of God is identified with a strict code, imposed by way of special privilege on a chosen people. In Pharisaism all the elements which can be discerned in the earlier religion were welded together in a consistent whole. By this perfecting of the Law the whole previous effort, from the time of Moses onward, was brought to its consummation.

Christianity, it cannot too often be repeated, was not the outcome of Judaism but a new religion, based on a different principle. In the natural course of development nothing in the least resembling it could have arisen. None the less, in Judaism it had its indispensable basis. It is no mere metaphor when we speak of Judaism as the mother-religion, which brought Christianity into being and bequeathed to it much of its own character and likeness. This is apparent when we think of several of the fundamental conceptions which the two religions had in common.

(1) In the first place, the Christian idea of God as the one divine Sovereign who rules the world in righteousness was a gift from Judaism. It had been won with infinite difficulty by the Hebrew thinkers, and Jesus was now able to take it over as self-evident and to build on it as a foundation. In the Gentile world Christianity could never have arisen. It rested on the belief in one God, which to the Pagan mind was hardly intelligible. We know from the Book of Acts and the early Fathers that the first and most arduous task of the Church in its Gentile mission was simply to enforce the monotheistic idea. Even the philosophical thinkers had never passed beyond the hypothesis of an abstract Being, an ultimate principle of unity which was behind all the manifold of existence. The knowledge of the one God, righteous and holy, had come to Jesus as part of his Jewish inheritance. Apart from it he could not have offered his revelation.

(2) Again, the Hebrew thinkers had worked out a noble morality, and this also passed over into the new religion. The ethical demands of Jesus and his apostles are frequently stated in the very words of the Old Testament, and when the traditional ethic is modified or carried to higher issues it is everywhere presupposed. In this connection it is only just to recognise the debt of Christianity not only to the Old Testament but to the Law. Modern investigation is proving, ever more fully, how much in the teaching of Jesus goes back to the Rabbinical schools. For almost every precept in

the Gospels some kind of parallel can be discovered in the Jewish literature. There is indeed a serious danger of exaggerating the debt and misunderstanding its nature ; but the main fact cannot be denied. The Law with all its limitations, had been a wonderful instrument for the deepening and refinement of the moral sense. It subjected to a close analysis the ethical principles laid down by the Prophets, and showed how they were to be applied in all the business of life. As a consequence it had made possible a moral insight to which the Prophets themselves had never attained. In the Book of Ecclesiasticus, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, the maxims of Hillel and his successors, the Old Testament ethic is clarified and expanded, and a subtler perception is brought to bear on moral problems. Jesus inherited the Jewish ethic after it had thus passed through the crucible of the Law. There was much that he discarded, and on all that he accepted he put the impress of his own thought. But the basis of his ethical teaching is to be found in Judaism.

(3) It was Judaism, likewise, which provided the speculative background of his teaching. Hebrew religion had never developed a philosophy. It was founded on moral judgments, on an intuitive sense of the spiritual meaning of the world. The beliefs thus given appeared so self-evident that no attempt was made to confirm them by means of metaphysical reasoning. We indeed hear of a " wisdom " which was cultivated in Israel from the earliest times, and which flowered in such books as Job and Ecclesiastes. But it consisted mainly of moral observation and reflection. In the hands of great masters it reached splendid heights, but the element of speculation, which we find in the Greek thinkers, was absent from it. It was to Greek philo-

sophy that Jewish teachers finally turned when they felt the need of a speculative basis for their religion. But, while Judaism had no native philosophy, it possessed a kind of substitute for it in Apocalyptic. In Israel, as everywhere else, men had always asked themselves how the world had originated, how it would end, what were the invisible forces which acted on nature and on human life. To answer such questions they had devised a mythology which was supplemented from Babylonian and Persian sources. The Prophets had foretold a glorious future when God would reign, and when His mysterious dealings with His people would be explained and justified. This conception was now thrown into the mythological framework. It was believed that the world's history was to fall into two ages—the present age, which was under the dominion of evil powers, and the coming age, or Kingdom of God. The inauguration of this new age would be preceded by a Judgment, in which the wicked would be condemned and God's people set apart for eternal life. The whole present order would then be dissolved, and God would establish His sovereignty in a new and better world. In the hope of this great future a solution was found for all the baffling problems of the present. The righteous God seemed to be idle and forgetful, but the day was coming when He would assert Himself and all wrongs would be righted. Under the forms provided for him by the Jewish apocalyptic ideas Jesus proclaimed his gospel.

Much has been made, in the more recent investigation, of this apocalyptic background of Christianity. It has been held by many writers that Jesus was a visionary, who expected a new world to be established by a sudden miracle. The key to all his teaching has been sought in the fantastic literature which began with the Book of Daniel and died out soon after the fall of Jerusalem. But it must never be forgotten that the apocalyptic ideas, although they assumed a peculiar form in the later Judaism, were not merely the product of a bizarre movement. The hope for the Kingdom of God had always been central to the religion of Israel. Out of the faith in the one righteous God there had inevitably sprung the belief that He would at last be sovereign over the whole world. Apocalyptic was nothing but the imaginative expression of this great primary belief. It becomes evident, too, the more we study the thought of Jesus, that he used apocalyptic only as a sort of pictorial language. His message is in no way dependent on those fanciful conceptions, current in his time. It can be separated from them and thrown into other forms, without any loss of its intrinsic meaning.

Christianity, therefore, in more than an historical sense, was the child of Judaism. From the parent religion it derived its idea of God, its ethical teaching, its faith in the coming Kingdom. We cannot wonder that many scholars, when they compare the New Testament with the literature of Judaism, have declared that everything is borrowed. But the many similarities serve only to throw the differences into sharper relief. We are compelled to ask ourselves why a religion so closely akin to Judaism and so deeply indebted to it was essentially new. At no time was it a mere variant of Judaism. While it appeared in so many ways to continue the Jewish tradition, it stood for principles which were inwardly destructive of the religion of the Law. What were these new principles ? In these, and not in its Jewish antecedents, we must look for the real meaning of the gospel.

CHAPTER III

THE MESSAGE OF JESUS

THE chief interest in Christian thought has always centred in Jesus himself. In former times it was governed, almost wholly, by theological motives. How must we conceive of the Person of Jesus? In what relation did he stand to God? What was the purpose of his Incarnation? How did he effect an Atonement for sin? Such questions could admit of no certain answer, and in the effort to answer them the Church became hopelessly divided. Too often the discussion of them had little to do with the realities of the Christian life.

The interest has shifted, within the last century, from the doctrinal issues to the historical facts. Of the pre-existence of Jesus and the nature of his risen life we can know nothing, but a record has been given us of how he lived on earth. From his own words and actions we can determine the purpose which he set before him. We can build up a theology which will no longer be nebulous and hypothetical. To multitudes of Christians this change of interest has come as an immense relief. They feel that at last they are standing on solid ground. They are brought face to face with the actual Jesus, and can try to understand him for themselves. By this return from speculation to history the way seems to be open for a new statement of Christianity which will be accepted by all.

It cannot be said that the change of attitude has brought the assurance and the unanimity which were confidently expected a generation ago. In place of the old doctrinal controversies we have historical ones, in which opinions are even more widely at variance. No sooner was the life of Jesus made the subject of inquiry than it was found to involve a multitude of problems. To be sure, it is recorded in written documents, but how far can they be trusted? How can they be harmonised when they differ, as they constantly do, from one another? Even when we accept them as fully historical they are evidently made up of fragmentary traditions, which afford us at the best mere glimpses of Jesus. On the basis of them no certain answer can be given to some of the most vital questions concerning his work and purpose. In any case, an historical record is necessarily inadequate. It deals with the facts in their external aspects. It sets Jesus before us as he appeared to others, and has nothing to tell us of that inner, personal life which was the real one, and which we chiefly desire to know. The strange result has come about that some of the leaders in the historical inquiry are now advocating a return to the purely doctrinal positions. They maintain that since we can know so little of the real Jesus we must be content to apprehend him by an act of faith. Our highest conceptions of the divine may crystallise around this Person, who has taken such a hold of the world's imagination. Who he was, or whether he existed at all, may be viewed as a matter of indifference. Nothing can affect the value which he has for us as the supreme symbol of our faith in God.

It may be admitted that much of this scepticism is justified. Our knowledge of Jesus is derived almost wholly from the four Gospels, and their testimony is often confused and contradictory. They date from a time considerably later than the events, and are compiled from brief notices which in many points had become unintelligible to the evangelists themselves. Their account of the facts is coloured by theological ideas which seem to have been at work almost from the start. The record, moreover, only professes to cover the short period of the active ministry, and even of this it preserves no more than a few disjointed anecdotes, of which the sequence and often the true import are quite uncertain. From such a record how can we hope to construct any adequate picture ?

This is not the place to enter into any discussion of the tangled Synoptic Problem ; yet it may be said that the negative results of much recent criticism are unwarranted. There may indeed be many things in the narrative which are due to later guess-work or reflection, but the literary analysis has surely demonstrated that it rests on genuine tradition. The fundamental data must have existed in a written form at a time when the career of Jesus was still a living memory. It must be noted, too, that the different narratives, while often in conflict on matters of detail, are in broad agreement. The testimonies on which they rest were independent, and were biased by very different interests ; yet the Jesus who speaks to us in the Parables and the Sayings is unmistakably the same as the hero of Mark's narrative. Everything we hear of him bears the same stamp. All his words and actions are in harmony with each other and have the same individuality behind them. This is equally true when we turn to Paul's letters, to the Epistle to the Hebrews, to the Fourth Gospel—pervaded as these writings are with theological ideas. Paul can truly say that he does not proclaim "another Jesus." The character which stands out before him and which he clothes with mystical attributes is manifestly the same as that which is described in the Gospels. However we may regard various details of the narrative, there is no room for doubt that it reflects, with substantial truth, an historical Personality which had left a clear and ineffaceable impression.

One cannot but feel, indeed, that much of the negative criticism works with a pedantic method which is radically false. It concentrates on doubtful minutiæ, and so proceeds to call in question the outstanding facts. This method can be employed to explain away any of the great actions and characters of history. There is scarcely an incident in the Battle of Waterloo of which we do not have conflicting versions. Some of the most celebrated stories about Cæsar, Napoleon, Lincoln, have been demonstrated to be quite unauthentic. Must we therefore conclude that we know nothing about the battle—that all our conceptions of those great men are baseless? No; it is not from one casual incident or another that historical estimates are formed. They represent the total impression which was left by the man's life, by the manifest results of the action. The remembered details serve only to illustrate in a typical manner this large impression. It is possible by means of a microscopic criticism to challenge the accuracy of almost every detail in the Gospel record, but this does not greatly matter. In the inquiry into the life of Jesus we must not set out from the minor discrepancies. They no doubt exist, and at times are sufficiently perplexing, but they in no way invalidate the general truth of the narrative. We need to begin with the great indubitable facts—that Jesus inspired his followers with a boundless devotion, that he brought good tidings to the poor and distressed, that he worked for the Kingdom of God and was faithful unto death. These are the foundations of the history, and no criticism can shake them.

Not only may the record be accepted as genuine, but when every allowance is made for doubtful additions it is surprisingly full. Too much has been made of the complaint that with the scanty data we possess no real Life of Jesus can ever be written. When the scattered references are brought together we know more than is generally assumed even of the years before the ministry. For the ministry itself we have a large mass of reminiscences, often very briefly related, but none the less vivid and significant. There are few lives of antiquity of which we know anything like so much. It must be noted, too, that the record deals far less with mere outward happenings than with incidents, linked as a rule with some memorable saying, which reveal character. Such anecdotes are the most valuable part of any biography. They may not tell us how the world treated the man, but they illuminate the man himself. What he was, in his own mind and will and sympathies, is most truly his life.

It is indeed a strange illusion that no man can be properly known to us without a long biography, in which everything that happened to him is duly chronicled. If the life of Jesus is the most difficult of all lives to understand, it is not because the records are confined to a few chapters. The real difficulty consists in the nature of the life itself, in the difference of Jesus from all other men. There is no standard by which we can judge him. We know nothing of the motives and inward experiences which lay behind his visible actions. This knowledge could not have been conveyed to us by any record, and it is our want of it which makes the life so mysterious. It may confidently be said that, if we had possessed an official biography of Jesus in which everything he ever did was carefully noted, most of the serious difficulties would be just as great as they are now. Perhaps they would be greater, for in the present record the essential facts are at least apparent. They are not smothered up under heaps of irrelevant detail so that their significance is lost. We have little reason to complain of our Gospels. However they originated, and whatever may be their shortcomings, they have made Jesus known to us as fully as he could be known.

Accepting our Gospels, then, as substantially trustworthy, we are faced by one question which has not sprung merely out of modern criticism. In the life as it is set before us do we find an adequate explanation of the results that followed ? The religion which takes its name from Christ has been incomparably the greatest power that has ever worked in the world. For two thousand years it has shaped the course of history. It has provided the impulse to men's deepest thought and highest endeavour. For millions of souls it has been the pathway to God. Can all this be accounted for by anything we know of Jesus ? His ministry appears to have lasted for about two years, and was nothing but a passing episode in the doings of a remote province. Outwardly there was little in it to challenge the world's attention, and even when we look beneath the surface it might seem to present little that was striking and original. Jesus was indeed a wonderful moral teacher. He uttered a series of maxims which are unequalled for their beauty and simplicity, and have stamped themselves indelibly on the minds of all men since. Yet, for the most part, they deal with elementary truths which were already embodied in the higher ethic of Judaism. How did they come to supply the basis for a new and sublime religion? The feeling grew up before the first century was ended that the historical life of Jesus was not sufficient to account for Christianity. In the Gnostic schools the attempt was made to enhance its import by weaving a mythology around the given events and interpreting the sayings in a mystical, allegorical sense. Modern scholars have sought the same end by a different method. Assuming that the cause was not sufficient to produce the effect, they make out that it was only the proximate cause. Jesus, according to this theory, provided a nucleus around which, by a marvellous combination of circumstances, the whole religious movement of the age happened to crystallise. The Christian religion as a world-wide power was never foreseen or dreamed of by Jesus. He was the founder of a minor Jewish sect, and probably did not aspire even to that distinction. But the sect which took its origin from him went out into the Hellenistic world and fell heir eventually to all its spiritual possessions. In this appropriation of elements given from without we must look for the true beginning of Christianity.

Now the view that Jesus himself had only a casual and nominal connection with his religion is on the face of it incredible. The Apostles, it is certain, were fully convinced that they were carrying on his work. A passionate loyalty to him was the one motive of all their activity. It is sometimes argued that their devotion was centred on an imaginary, theological being, to whom they merely attached his name. But behind all the theology there was the memory of the historical Jesus, transforming abstract beliefs into personal faith and love. If proof were needed that Christian piety was always directed towards Jesus, as he had actually been, we find it in the very existence of our Gospels. They were written to satisfy an urgent need, and the four which survive were only a few out of many. They took rank from the first as the primary literature of the Church. They were reproduced in countless manuscripts, and are constantly quoted in the early writings as familiar to everybody. One cannot but feel that Church history has given too much prominence to the doctrinal discussions which bulk so largely in the Fathers. For theologians these were doubtless of cardinal importance, but the mass of Christian people do not seem to have been greatly concerned with this side of their religion. What attracted them in those early days, as it has done ever since, was the story of Jesus, recorded in the Gospels.

It must indeed be granted that Christianity, in its later development, became vastly different from anything that Jesus himself appears to have contemplated. We know it now as a system of thought which embraces the whole universe, a mode of worship which employs all the resources of music and poetry and architecture, an ethic which undertakes to answer all the problems in the many-sided life of our modern world. Jesus himself, we often hear it said, would not now recognise his own religion ; and from this it is inferred that it has little to do with him. But on the same lines we might argue, with much greater truth, that Columbus did not discover America. What he discovered was a tiny outlying island, and to the end of his days he never knew of the vast continent. He was ignorant, too, that he had found his way to a new world, and supposed that he had merely approached India or China from the other side. Yet no one challenges his claim to the great discovery. Those who followed him only completed what was in his mind and purpose. He was as truly the discoverer as if he had traversed the new continent from end to end. And this was equally true of Jesus. He did not foresee Christianity as it was to be. It may be that he never thought out the implications of his work, or conceived of himself as founding a new religion. Nevertheless, Christianity sprang out of his message. All the after-development has been nothing but the effort to unfold more fully and in new directions what he gave.

At the same time, we must be careful not to interpret his own aim too narrowly. Many recent scholars, in their anxiety to be strictly historical, have thought it necessary to limit as much as possible the horizon of Jesus. They take for granted that the more they can shut him in to some petty immediate object, the nearer they must needs be to the facts. This idea that we must minimise Jesus if we would apprehend him as a really historical figure is responsible for various theories which have found much favour at the present day. We are told, for instance, that his work must all be explained in view of the political situation of his time, and was meant in some way to help on the movement for Jewish independence. Or it was social or economic in its character—a protest on behalf of the peasant and artisan against the arrogance of the wealthy class. Or it was merely designed to correct some of the errors of current Rabbinical teaching, and at the same time to offer religious instruction to the common people, in a simple form which they could understand. Such theories, at first sight, appear to be psychologically more probable than the older one, that Jesus deliberately set himself to save the world. But even on this ground they break down. Every great reformer yet has been a visionary. He has not worked so much for an immediate practical aim as for some splendid hope which he descried in the far distance. We must surely concede to Jesus that larger intention which has inspired all prophets and benefactors. And when we look into the actual tenor of his teaching one thing is abundantly clear. His purpose from first to last was a *religious* one. He was not interested in the small issues of Jewish politics; indeed, his chief difficulty was to avoid the complications which were always arising from this side. Neither did he concern himself with the disputes of rival sects or with economic quarrels. His mind was set, without any deviation, on great spiritual ends. "The Kingdom of God is at hand." This was his proclamation, and in the light of it we must understand all his work.

All our accounts agree that Jesus took up this proclamation from John the Baptist, whose announcement of a great crisis, just at hand, had aroused the whole nation. There is no evidence, however, that Jesus was a disciple of John, and merely continued the prophet's work after his arrest. John, it must be remembered, had not introduced the idea of the Kingdom for the first time. His success was due to the very fact that hope for the Kingdom had always been the grand motive of Jewish religion. All pious souls were looking for this manifestation of God, which John declared to be now imminent. It was John who impelled Jesus to enter on his mission, and who provided him with his watchword ; but this does not mean that the relation between them had ever been that of master and disciple. Jesus responded to John for no other reason than that he himself in his years of solitude had been pondering the hope of the Kingdom. The conviction had been growing in his mind that he had a work to do for the Kingdom, and John's message was nothing but the trumpet-call which summoned him to his task.

What was this work to which he felt himself appointed ? Did he merely seek, like John, to impress on men that the Kingdom was near, and that they must be prepared ? Or did he set himself to explain, more clearly and fully than John had done, the conditions on which it might be entered ? These views have found many advocates, but they assume that he only followed up the work of John. His very object in embarking on his mission was to do a *different* work. John already had disciples who were carrying on his special enterprise. Jesus was conscious that he had a task beyond that of John. The Baptist himself had put forward a very lofty claim. He believed that he was not merely the prophet of the Kingdom, but was commissioned by God to accept men, by a solemn rite, as the destined heirs of it. If Jesus could declare that he was greater than John, that John's work had been only the prelude to his own work, it must have been that he thought of himself not as herald of the Kingdom but as in some manner instrumental to its coming.

Here it is necessary to bear in mind the two ideas which are everywhere combined in his conception of the Kingdom. (1) He assumed, on the one hand, as Hebrew thought had always done, that the new order must be brought in by God Himself. It was the reign of God, the new age when all things would be brought under God's sovereignty. Man could no more create it than he could make the sun to rise or the harvest to ripen. Its whole meaning was that the world's deliverance would depend no longer on poor human endeavour. God Himself would intervene with His all-prevailing power. (2) On the other hand, the coming of the Kingdom was impossible without human co-operation. God would not exert His power until men were ready. They were not condemned wholly to a passive waiting. By prayer and repentance and ardent longing they might move the will of God and so hasten the deliverance. They might so prepare themselves that even now they should inwardly belong to the Kingdom. In the mind of Jesus these two conceptions merged in one another the more naturally since he thought of the Kingdom as above all a moral order. No doubt he accepted the current anticipations of a great outward change, when nature would be more fruitful and glorious, when all disease and misery and oppression would have an end. The whole creation would share in the liberty of the children of God. But the outward renovation was to him secondary. The true change would consist in the new moral conditions. God's will would be done on earth as in heaven. The transfigured world would only provide the stage for this life of perfect obedience to God. So it followed that even now men could in some measure anticipate the Kingdom. By willing submission to God they might be conformed to the new order and thus feel at home in it when it came.

Jesus believed, then, that he was appointed, in some manner, to bring in the Kingdom. It has been held by a number of recent writers that the Messianic claim was only attributed to him after his death. They point out that his activity was wholly that of a teacher. They make much of the fact that he never made any public announcement of his Messiahship, apart from the alleged confession before the high-priest. Undoubtedly the whole question of the Messianic claim is beset with grave problems, and it may be granted that he arrived gradually and reluctantly at the assurance that he was Messiah. He was aware of the terrible danger to which the claim would at once expose him. He could not but feel; too, that his aims were in conflict, at many points, with the traditional hopes and predictions. Yet it may be affirmed that the idea of his Messiahship, although it did not take definite form till near the end was implicit in his consciousness from the first. He knew that he was necessary for the coming in of the Kingdom, and under the conditions of Jewish thought he had no alternative but to identify himself with the Messianic hope. Our Gospels rightly accentuate his claim to be Messiah, for it is only in view of it that his message and the story of his life can be rightly interpreted.

How did he conceive, then, of his Messianic task? The objection has often been urged that our gospel history involves a contradiction, and something like an anti-climax. Its theme is ostensibly "Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God,"[1] but what it really describes is the life of a teacher, who even in his teaching confined himself mostly to simple ethical precepts. Surely it must have been the later Church, under the influence of some error or imagination, which transformed this teacher of righteousness into the Messianic King. This contention, however, is based on a superficial and, if one may say so, a vulgar understanding of the gospel history. It offers the modern counterpart to those crude, material conceptions of the Kingdom of God with which Jesus came in conflict during his lifetime. For him, as we have seen, the Kingdom did not consist in earthly deliverance and prosperity. He thought of it, rather, as the new moral order, when all human wills would be reconciled to the will of God. The Messiah of popular anticipation, who would exercise supernatural power and destroy all enemies by the breath of his mouth, could do nothing to further the coming of *this* Kingdom, which would only manifest itself when men knew the will of God and accepted it with their whole heart. How could this moral change be effected ? Only by renewing the minds and wills of men—only by teaching. The story of the Temptation, whatever may have been its basis, truly reflects the decision which Jesus made when he entered on his ministry. He put away from him the modes of action which to common eyes seemed the most effectual, and chose the slow and difficult path. Thus only could he achieve his end.

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[1] Mark i. 1.

It has been held that towards the close of his life his plan underwent a radical change. He had believed in the efficacy of teaching, but had been disappointed, and resolved at last on action. By confronting the assembled nation with an open claim to Messiahship he intended to bring his cause to a decisive issue. He foresaw, perhaps, that he would die, but believed that in this way he would accomplish the end for which he had hitherto worked in vain. Now it is impossible to penetrate the thought of Jesus when he set his face to go up to Jerusalem. Most probably he knew his death to be inevitable, and determined to meet it, in the confidence that God had willed it for the bringing in of the Kingdom. But whatever may have been his motive, there is no contradiction between the great closing act and the work of teaching which had preceded it. The death of Jesus gave crowning expression to all that he had taught. As Paul was to recognise, and as all generations have felt since, the whole message was concentrated in the Cross, and apart from it would lose its convincing power.

There is a point here which has often been overlooked, and which it is hardly possible to emphasise too much. Our Gospels speak of "the things which Jesus did and said"; they remind us everywhere that the action and the teaching must be taken together. This does not mean merely that Jesus tried to illustrate by his life the truths he taught, knowing that example is better than precept. It means rather that the essential note of his ministry was *action*. In some respects the name of "Teacher," which we commonly apply to him, is misleading, and is largely accountable for a wrong understanding of his work. The great moral teachers, properly so called, have been interested in morality for its own sake. Just as the chemist and physicist are concerned with the nature of matter, so Aristotle and Kant took the moral law as their subject of investigation. They inquired into its basis and sanction, and the conditions under which it must operate. But in the teaching of Jesus there is no such theoretical interest. He is not concerned with the why and wherefore of the moral law, but is content to accept it as given by God. Even as compared with the practical moralists who have laid down rules for right living, he does not offer any reasoned system. It has justly been complained that for many important spheres of duty he has given no direction. When we conceive of him as the Teacher by whose precepts all conduct must be guided, we are constantly left in perplexity. The truth is that he was far more a man of action than a teacher. His place is not with the thinkers and moralists, but with the great leaders. This is apparent from all that we know of his character. He was not a meditative recluse, but intensely interested in the life around him, and marvellously shrewd in his judgments of men and motives. Numerous instances are given us of the practical wisdom with which he extricated himself from the snares that beset him in that peculiarly dangerous time. He possessed in supreme measure the royal gift of attracting men and bending them to his will. When the final crisis came upon him he bore himself with magnificent courage and resolve. We do not wonder that the people, according to the notice in John's Gospel, sought to take him by force to make him a king. They felt that as a wandering teacher he was wasting himself. Here, if anywhere, was the Heaven-sent leader for whom the nation had been waiting. This was certainly the impression he made on his disciples. It has often been remarked that immediately after his death his work as a teacher, to which apparently his life had been devoted, was allowed to fall into the background. For his followers he became the Messianic King, who would presently return in glory. This has been urged, with strange ineptitude, as the manifest proof that a misunderstanding set in from the first. The Teacher was transformed into a King, with the result that the new way of life was henceforth construed in terms of a fanciful theology. But the truth is that the disciples continued to think of Jesus in the character which he had always possessed for them. It now stood out more vividly in the light of those prophetic anticipations which he seemed to have realised, but they had known him in his lifetime as a sovereign personality. They had never doubted that the real object of his coming was to *do* some great work, laid on him by God. That Jesus was a teacher does not mean that he turned away from action. On the contrary, he gave himself to teaching because he saw in it the one effective mode of action. Regarding himself as God's instrument for the bringing in of the Kingdom, he perceived that all the traditional ideas of the Messiah's work were childish and futile. If a day was to come when the will of God would be the sole law, it would not be brought nearer by conquest, or by new institutions, or by a sudden miracle. Nothing could be effected until the wills of men were changed. Jesus was the first who recognised that the real forces are spiritual, and who was prepared to trust them absolutely. In this sense he interpreted his Messianic mission.

It is necessary to repeat that we do not begin to understand the life of Jesus until we realise that it was essentially a life of action. His primary aim was not to instruct or enlighten, but to do something which would make the Kingdom possible. It appears strange at first sight that Mark, our earliest Gospel, only deals with the teaching incidentally. Was it that this evangelist was ignorant of the Sayings, or knew them in some imperfect version, or failed to perceive their value ? The true reason is, we can hardly doubt, that he was faithful to the earliest tradition of the Church. While he knows the teaching, he is conscious that it was subordinate to the main purpose of Jesus. It was only one element in a ministry which was directed from first to last towards action. Here, too, we are to seek for the true reason why the Gospels lay such stress on the miracles. The insistence on them appears to the modern mind to strike a discordant note. Even if we accept them as fully authenticated, was it necessary to put them forward as the characteristic "works" of Jesus? His teaching, surely, stands on its own basis. It does not need to be supported by those outward signs, calculated to impress a wonder-loving age. Yet the evangelists attach a special significance to the miracles, and connect them in the closest manner with the spoken words. Those works of power—and this, in the last resort, was their import—served to remind men that the words also were dynamic. He who could say, "Thy sins be forgiven thee" could say, "Take up thy bed and walk." It was felt that apart from the miracles the central fact about the teaching of Jesus might be missed. What he gave was something more than counsel or instruction. His words, as the Fourth Evangelist expresses it, were spirit and life.

In the message of Jesus, therefore, two things have to be distinguished—the actual ideas which are conveyed, and the power which makes these ideas vital and effectual. The distinction is a very real one, though it is almost impossible to apply it in any rigid fashion. When we examine the Sayings one by one they may seem merely to repeat familiar truths. It can be shown that parallels for almost all of them can be found in earlier literature, and we ask ourselves what Jesus contributed that was specifically new. Yet nothing is more certain than that the old ideas, taken up into his teaching, acquired a new quality. They ceased to be theoretical, and became capable of moving and transforming the lives of men. When we try to discover the new element in the teaching we must look for it here. It was not the object of Jesus to construct a fresh system of knowledge. His purpose was dynamic.

From the body of ideas that lay ready to his hand he selected, with unerring instinct, those which were most vital, and so presented them that henceforth they could work with power.

His main conceptions, as we have seen, had come to him out of the long spiritual struggle of Israel. He fell heir to the belief in the one God who is the God of righteousness. He accepted the ethical teaching of the Prophets. He owed a debt which is only beginning to be acknowledged to the Jewish Law, which, with all its shortcomings as a religious system, had deepened and refined the moral sense and had insisted on obedience to God as the chief duty of man. It has to be recognised, too, that the forms in which he clothed his message were inherited. Those apocalyptic ideas must not be confused with the message itself. Even in Daniel and the Book of Enoch they are plainly half-symbolical, and imagination is free to play around them and modify them at will. Jesus adopts them only as the vehicle for his moral and spiritual teaching. Sometimes, as in his pictures of the Last Judgment and of the rich man and Lazarus in the other world, he uses them consciously by way of parable. Nevertheless, they supplied a real element of strength to the gospel. We may no longer believe that the world will shortly end in a great catastrophe, and that God will assert His sovereignty in some visible, miraculous way, but the Christian ideas are still apprehended most vividly through the apocalyptic imagery. This is apparent not only from the place it has always held in popular belief, but from its employment in the highest art and poetry. Religion cannot live on abstractions. The assumption that it might do so was the fatal error in the old dogmatic theology; and in modern times we are only repeating this error in another form when we try to resolve Christianity into a purely spiritual or ethical system—freeing it, as we suppose, from all that is temporary and fantastic. Symbolism must always be the natural language of religion, and in the apocalyptic beliefs the gospel possesses a noble and expressive symbolism, from which its essential teaching can never be separated without serious loss.

Jesus, therefore, took over the old conceptions, and there is a measure of truth in the view that what he did was to simplify and liberalise the Judaism of his age, and so transform it into a universal religion. This would itself have been a great achievement. No other religion could compare with Judaism in spiritual value, but it was so closely entangled with a peculiar tradition that it was essentially a racial cult. Jesus would have done much if he had only made the faith of Israel available to all the world. But while he did this he did much more. In adopting the Jewish ideas he at the same time re-created them, and charged them with a new quality which made them living and effectual.

(1) For one thing, he impressed on men the conviction that the sovereign God is also the Father, whose will is one of love, and who seeks and saves that which is lost. It has often been maintained that this conception of God was not original with Jesus. The name "Father" has been applied to God in almost all religions. In the Old Testament and the Jewish devotional literature much is beautifully said about the love and providence and gracious will of God. But it was Jesus who first perceived that these are the primary attributes in the light of which the whole nature of God must be understood. The divine

righteousness had formerly been conceived as a rigorous justice, which rewards every man strictly according to his deeds. For Jesus righteousness and mercy were ultimately one. He found the supreme type of Justice not in the inflexible judge who weighs men's actions in mechanical scales, but in the father, who thinks of his children individually, and allows for their weaknesses, and through all his discipline looks only to their good. God is altogether just because He is altogether loving, the Father of men. But Jesus gave something more than a new and larger conception of the nature of God. He made it possible for men to believe in this God whom he revealed as Father. This was his real achievement—to change a mere doctrine about God into an assured conviction by which men could direct their lives. Before he came there were many who surmised that God was just and merciful; hundreds of passages have been culled out of ancient literature which seem to anticipate, as far as words go, the teaching of Jesus. Did he contribute anything that was specifically new? Yes; he did more than teach something about God. For millions he has made the divine Father a reality. He put the breath of life into what had hitherto been pious belief or speculation. Along with his teaching there went a power which transformed man's thought and will.

(2) Again, his conception of God as Father involved a new conception of our relation to God. It was changed from one of fear and calculation to one of love and free obedience. At this point we discern most clearly the difference between the religion of Jesus and all previous religion. As Paul expressed it, the principle of Christianity was faith, not works of the Law. No doubt,

as modern scholars have been at pains to show us, the Law was something more to pious Jews than a grievous yoke. The performance of it was a delight. It was accepted as a high privilege, whereby men could fulfil the true purpose of their lives by right service of God. Yet the Law was at best a burden imposed from without. Obedience to it might become a second nature, but it was the result of constraint, and could never yield more than a formal satisfaction. With Jesus the service of God sprang of its own accord out of trust and love. Since God is the Father, His will may be obeyed spontaneously, in the full confidence that it is always for our highest good. The sense of constraint, of submission to an outward rule, disappears. Men can make the will of God their own, and find in it their true life.

(3) Jesus taught the absolute value of the individual human soul. Since God is the Father, who cares for each one of His children, all have a place in His love. No man is at liberty to despise his fellow-man, or use him as an instrument for his own ends. Hitherto it had been assumed that God's care, except in rare instances, was for the tribe or the nation. The Greek thinkers, indeed—especially the Stoics—had reached the conception of a reason common to all men, in virtue of which they had certain inalienable rights. This conception is reflected in Roman law, and finds noble expression in poets and moralists, from Euripides onwards. Yet it never went further than an abstract regard for the rational principle in all humanity. It was powerless to counteract the old abuses of slavery, cruelty, social injustice. Jesus was the first who recognised the value of each man as a personality. He was led to this recognition not by any philosophising

about human nature, but by his faith in God as the Father, who must needs care for each one of His children with a distinguishing love. Every soul has a value in God's sight, and our own attitude to our fellows must therefore be one of reverence, kindness, self-effacement. This, it may be noted, is the element in Jesus' teaching which in all times has made it a revolutionary leaven in society. We find nothing in Jesus of the vague humanitarian sentiment, careless as a rule of individual rights and sufferings, which has often posed as Christianity. What he insists on is our duty to our neighbour as an actual person. And out of this teaching has grown the demand for a social system in which the welfare of no individual, however humble, shall be sacrificed for the supposed benefit of the mass. The Christian conscience can never be satisfied while any man is denied the right of living his own life and developing as a free personality. In this manner the spirit of Jesus is working continually for the building up of a new society.

(4) It was Jesus who made men realise that the spiritual ends are supreme, and that life must be wholly directed towards them. Here, again, it may be said that he only repeated, perhaps with a clearer emphasis, what many had maintained before him. The Hebrew sages had taught that wisdom is better than rubies, that fellowship with God is the supreme good. Greek and Roman literature is full of encomiums on friendship and patriotism, on the life of tranquil thought, on the virtue which is its own reward. But it is not unjust to say that in this exaltation of the spiritual things there is almost always a hint of unreality. It was assumed as self-evident that the ends to be sought after were wealth and power, pleasure, length of days ;

there is a suspicion of the higher benefits which do not sooner or later transform themselves into these palpable things. Jesus never doubted that life exists solely for the spiritual ends. The man who has missed them has missed everything, whatever else he may have gained. This confidence is the more striking as it is combined with a sane judgment on the earthly goods. Jesus never affected a "contempt of the world," after the manner of the Stoic moralists or the mediæval monks. He acknowledged frankly that man has need of all the other things, but perceived that they have value only as a means to something beyond them. By its attainment of these higher possessions the whole worth of life is to be measured. Not only so, but he defined once for all the nature of those ends which men were to seek after. The moral appreciations until now had grown up at haphazard. Those qualities were esteemed highest which made for the preservation of the state, or for some given type of culture or well-being. Jesus took as his standard the absolute will of God. He required that all conduct should be guided by the one motive—"that ye may be children of your Father in heaven." The ends which men are to keep before them are those which God Himself pursues in His government of the world—love, righteousness, goodness. And as he revealed the nature of that higher good in which life consists, so he imparted the will by which we may seek to possess it. It is one of the great affirmations of Paul that Jesus had created a new type of humanity—he was the Adam of a new race. Like other Pauline conceptions, this one may reflect an ideal rather than a fact; yet it is the simple truth that with Jesus there came into the world a new sense of moral values. In a way that was previously impossible, men were made capable of working for those spiritual things which for Jesus had been the great realities.

(5) Once more, he provided the life of man with a centre—an inner spring and formative principle to which everything could be related. Here, perhaps, we come nearest to the secret of his religion. It has often been pointed out that in every form of faith there are pure and noble elements. The old division of religions into the true and the false was, as we can now see, radically mistaken. But the defect of all other religions is that they have no vital, unifying centre. Judaism, for example, was an amalgam of traditions, ceremonies, moral and spiritual beliefs, which had grown up through many centuries. The baser and the nobler elements were mingled together, and all belonged equally to the religion. There was no criterion by which the essential and the accidental could be distinguished, and the one resource of the Law was to insist that all its demands should be placed on the same footing, as in their totality comprising the will of God. In the teaching of even the greatest Pagan thinkers we likewise miss an inner principle. Ideas which outrage our moral sense are attributed to Socrates, and we have no means of determining whether he may or may not have held them. He had no creative conception of life, one with his very being, which necessarily moulded everything he thought and said. With Jesus it is otherwise. His sayings, whatever they deal with, have all the same stamp upon them. He looks at all things in the light of truths which he realises so intensely that his judgments must be what they are. Christianity all through its history has had the same characteristic. It has borrowed more than any other religion, but has always changed into its own likeness what it has borrowed. Now and

then it has tried to assimilate practices and beliefs which were alien to it, but these, in the long run, it has always rejected. Even the most ignorant Christian can usually say, when he is required to pass judgment on some action or sentiment, "This is, or is not, Christian." In this matter, indeed, the plain man's instinct can be more safely trusted than the arguments of the trained theologian. Nothing is more wonderful in the history of our religion than this fidelity it has always preserved to those governing motives which were impressed on it by Jesus. It has assumed many forms, it has developed doctrines and modes of activity which were never contemplated at the beginning. Yet through all changes it has carried with it that inner principle by which everything can be tested, and out of which everything has grown.

What is this principle? As has been said already, it is impossible to define Christianity. It means faith in God, human brotherhood, devotion to spiritual ends, but to all these things it imparts a character different from that which they bear in any other religion. Perhaps the most adequate definition is conveyed in the mediæval phrase, "the imitation of Christ." The Christian life is that which reflects in some degree the life of Christ; the Christian mode of thought is that exemplified in his teaching. In other words, the secret of the Christian religion is to be found in the living personality of Jesus. To be a Christian is not merely to obey certain rules which he laid down, but to reproduce in oneself his will, his attitude to God and man. Even this definition, however, misses something, and, indeed, the essential thing. To imitate Christ may imply nothing more than that Christ offered himself as an example on which we may try to mould ourselves, just as we may take one eminent life or another as our model. Such imitation always defeats its own end. It results in a mere aping of externals which brings into more painful relief the inward difference. An imitator, even of a great model, will never become what he copies, and misses his chance of attaining to some real character of his own. What Jesus gave was not only the model but the power to grow like it. Those whom we recognise as in the true sense Christian possess, in their own degree, the spirit which manifested itself in Jesus. They can say with Paul, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." It was the distinctive work of Christ that he gave to his followers a new quickening power by which they could become what he was. He not only declared the will of God but caused it to be realised in the lives of men. The name "Messiah" had come to him from Jewish tradition, and expressed very imperfectly the thought that was in his heart. Even in the first century it was felt to be inadequate, and gave place to other names. Yet when he claimed to be Messiah we can discern that he had conceived truly of his mission. Others had dreamed of the Kingdom of God, had prophesied it, had taught men how they might hasten its coming. He was conscious that he had been ordained by God for the fulfilment of the Kingdom.

CHAPTER IV

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

WITHIN a few years after Jesus' death a society had come into being which called itself by his name and aimed at carrying his gospel over the whole world. From the outset it was different from any other society. It possessed a number of peculiar institutions. It made claims for itself which, to the outside world, seemed utterly extravagant. The message of Jesus was henceforth to be identified with this visible society of his people.

Of the origin of the Church we know nothing except what we can gather from the vague and scanty notices in the opening chapters of Acts. The author is manifestly anxious to tell us all that he can about those earliest days. He narrates several of the incidents in duplicate form, and amplifies the story by means of speeches and popular traditions. But with all this expansion his record is a meagre one, and the reasons are not hard to guess. The Church, absorbed in its task, had troubled little about the facts of its own history. Later events had crowded out the memory of earlier ones. After the fall of Jerusalem the primitive community had lost its position, and its documents had perhaps disappeared. But the chief reason why so little could be told of those early days was doubtless that the Church had come into being silently and almost unconsciously. Its beginnings were not marked by any events that could be remembered. Even the chief actors could offer no clear account of what had happened or of what their own part had been. Christian historians have often imagined some formal inauguration of the Church. The author of Acts himself is obviously concerned to fix the definite source of what had grown to be a mighty river. But the great movements of history have rarely begun in a manner that can be precisely determined. They are not the result of calm deliberation, but spring mysteriously out of hidden forces. It was thus, we may be sure, that the Church arose. No individual could claim to have started it. There was no set occasion on which the corner-stone was laid. Men were scarcely aware that anything had taken place when they saw before them the accomplished fact.

One question meets us at the outset. How was the Church related to the work of Jesus himself? It has been taken for granted, since an early date, that he contemplated it—that he was, in a literal sense, its Founder. His chief aim, as the Fourth Evangelist sees it, was to bring into being this community of his people which should perpetuate his work. Modern criticism, on the other hand, has denied that Jesus ever meant to constitute a church. He believed that the Kingdom was presently to come, and cannot have deemed it necessary to make any provision for a distant future. It belonged, moreover, to his very conception of the coming age that all outward organisations should have an end. There would be no place for them in that new order in which men would be united in free obedience to the will of God.

It can hardly be maintained, in view of the evidence, that Jesus anticipated the Church in its historical form.

His interest was not in institutions but in individual men. He taught that the new life must spring directly out of an inward impulse. He took nothing to do with form and ritual, and seems to have discarded even the simple rite of Baptism which had been practised by John. It is evident that after his death the work of building up an ecclesiastical system had to be done from the foundation. If he had prescribed a rule of any kind, like Benedict or Calvin or Wesley, his followers would have felt bound to adhere to it ; as it was, they had to enter on their task without any such guidance. For more than a century to come we find them experimenting with various systems—groping their way towards a uniform Church order with many conflicts and misgivings. Jesus did not formally initiate the Church ; and yet it cannot be regarded as a new departure, contrary to his plan. We know, for one thing, that he gathered around him his company of twelve disciples, not merely to assist him in his work, but to exemplify in their life together his new conception of brotherhood. We know, too, that this immediate body of followers was the centre of a much larger one—men and women who had been attracted by his teaching and looked to him as their leader. The Book of Acts can tell of a hundred and twenty who met at Jerusalem after his death ; [1] Paul speaks of an appearance of the risen Christ to " more than five hundred at once." [2] It has been assumed far too readily that the work of Jesus in his lifetime was almost fruitless. The success on which the Gospels lay repeated emphasis is supposed to have been transient and unreal, giving place before the end to decisive failure. Of this, however, there is no sign. Jesus went up to Jerusalem as the leader not of a forlorn hope but of a

[1] Acts i. 15.

[2] 1 Cor. xv. 6.

growing movement. On no other ground can the conspiracy which brought about his death be reasonably explained. If he had definitely failed, the Jewish authorities would have left him alone. They would not have risked a popular outbreak and joined hands with the Romans against their own countryman, out of pure vindictiveness. Their motive in deciding that he must immediately be put to death can have been no other than fear of a movement which was making dangerous progress. If it was not checked at once by violent means, it would presently be beyond control.

We cannot very well account for the origin and rapid extension of the Church unless we allow for this success which had been achieved by Jesus himself. He had made no effort to form an organised society, but had already won a large body of followers, who revered him and believed in his cause. It was this company of believing men and women which furnished the nucleus of the primitive Church. In Jesus' lifetime it had been held together by no other bond than that of personal loyalty, but after his death it began to constitute itself as a society. This was necessary not only for the sake of cohesion but in order to carry the teaching of Jesus into full effect. No spiritual possession can be long maintained without some kind of a society to represent it. Again and again in Christian history there have been protests against the organised Church, and attempts to break away from it ; but sooner or later these dissident movements have themselves been compelled to organise. By the very fact that he had proclaimed a message Jesus had created the need for a church. Not only so, but his message was by its nature *social.* He had taught that as children of God men were all brethren. They could realise their life for God only through mutual love and service. It has been abundantly proved in all ages that the Christian life is only possible in a community. By the effort to practise it men are at once drawn out of their isolation. The more they become Christian, the more they are obliged to form new ties with all sorts and conditions of men. This character of the religion declared itself from the first; and to argue that the Church was foreign to the intention of Jesus and gave a wrong direction to the movement he had begun, is idle and pedantic. He may not have consciously planned the Church, but it was the inevitable outcome of his work.

It is not difficult, then, to explain why the Church began. The real problem is to account for the peculiar character which it assumed from the first. No other institution known to history has ever in the least resembled the Christian Church. It was at once a religious society and a brotherhood for common life. It professed loyalty to the State and yet stood wholly aloof from it, subject to its own customs and laws. Existing on earth, it claimed to be an outpost of the heavenly community. A well-known passage in the Epistle to Diognetus describes this strange institution as it appeared to the world about the middle of the second century. "Christians are not distinguished from the rest of mankind either in locality or in speech or in customs. For they dwell not somewhere in cities of their own, nor practise an extraordinary kind of life. But while they dwell in cities of Greeks and Barbarians as the lot of each is cast, and follow the native customs in dress and food and the other arrangements of life, yet they live in their own countries as sojourners, they bear their share in all things as citizens and endure all hardships as strangers. Every foreign country is a fatherland to them, and every fatherland foreign. They find themselves in the flesh, and yet they live not after the flesh. Their existence is on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven."[1] How was it that all these characteristics, apparently so opposite to one another, were combined in the Church? To answer this question we have to consider more closely the main influences which worked together in its formation.

(1) The Church originated, as we have seen, in the fellowship which had gathered around Jesus in his lifetime. He had not consciously formed a society. A large number of men and women had come to believe in him, and sought to order their lives according to his precepts, but the bond which held them together was simply one of common reverence for the Master. After his death, when they were convinced that he was now Messiah, this personal bond became stronger than ever. It has often been remarked as strange that in the later books of the New Testament there is hardly any reference to the earthly life of Jesus, and only here and there a quotation of words which he had spoken. This has been adduced as the clearest proof that the Christian Church had little more than a nominal relation to the Jesus of history. But the seeming neglect of his earthly life was not due to any ignorance or forgetfulness. It came, rather, from the intense realisation that he was still living. There was no need to fall back on pious reminiscence, for he was still present with his people. They were bound to him just as in his lifetime, and under his invisible leadership were seeking to perpetuate that life of brotherhood which they had begun in his company. We have here

[1] *Ep. ad Diogn.*, 5.

a factor of immense importance, which is too often overlooked in the various attempts to explain the Church wholly from theological and mystical ideas. These undoubtedly had their place, but behind all else there was the effort to continue, under new conditions, the former life of discipleship. Convinced that Jesus was risen and was still watching over them, his followers were hardly conscious of a break in their intercourse with him. He had united them in fellowship with himself and with one another, and out of this union grew the great brotherhood which called itself the Church.

(2) Another formative influence is suggested by the very name, the "Ecclesia." The origin of this name has been much disputed, but all evidence appears to show that it was adopted from one of the Old Testament designations of the community of Israel. It alternates with such names as "the people of God,"[1] "the Israel of God,"[2] "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad."[3] The promises made to the ancient Israel are continually quoted as referring, self-evidently, to the Church. It needs to be remembered that at the outset the disciples had not grasped the truth that Jesus had given a new religion, which had nothing to do with racial limitations. They took for granted that he had come as the promised Messiah of Israel. To be sure, the nation had rejected him, but the Old Testament itself had distinguished between the nation as a whole and the "Remnant"—the faithful in Israel who constituted the true people of God. The Church claimed to be this Remnant. By the very fact that they had accepted Jesus as Messiah his followers had declared themselves the true heirs of that high destiny

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[1] 2 Cor. vi. 16. [2] Gal. vi. 16. [3] Jas. i. 1.

which had been prepared for Israel. They formed the first-fruits of the nation as it would be, when it had been gloriously restored. This conception of the Church as the new Israel was to have far-reaching consequences for the whole future of Christian thought. It had been one of the primary principles of Jesus' own teaching that God cares for men as His children, whom He knows one by one. This belief that each individual soul has a separate value was henceforth cardinal in Christianity; but it was combined with the Old Testament idea of a holy community. The Church now took the place of the favoured nation. It was assumed that the believer in Christ must be incorporated by the rite of baptism into the Christian society. Wherever Paul goes, on his missionary journeys, we find him, as a matter of course, establishing a church. It might consist of a tiny handful of members, but it represented the great body of which Christ was head. To be cast out of the Church meant nothing less than to be severed from Christ. Now it cannot be denied that this emphasis on the Church introduced a disturbing element into the Christian teaching. At first sight it might seem to involve a relapse into that communal religion against which Jesus himself had protested. But there was no real departure from the principles of Jesus. While he had asserted the immediate relation of the soul to God he had declared, no less emphatically, that men are bound up together. It is one of the fundamental thoughts in all his teaching that each man finds his opportunity for attaining to the higher life through intercourse with his fellow-men. The individual realises himself by his co-operation in the larger cause. This truth was latent in the Old Testament conception of the holy people, but it was hopelessly entangled with the belief that racial privileges had been vouchsafed to Israel. In the light of Jesus' teaching it was set free from the old limitations. The true Israel became a community, held together by a spiritual bond, in which men might support and edify one another in their service of God. There was no departure from the teaching of Jesus, but rather the assertion, in concrete form, of one of his central ideas.

(3) Here, however, we must consider a third influence—the most powerful of all—which brought about the formation of the Church. With the Old Testament conception of a holy people there was blended Jesus' own anticipation of the Kingdom of God. The Church was not merely the new Israel but the community of those who looked forward to the Kingdom and who would inherit it. As yet the inheritance was in the future. The disciples were "those who waited for the Lord's coming";[1] they were "saved in hope."[2] Yet the hope was so certain that it could be regarded as in some sense fulfilled. While living in this age the Christians inwardly belonged to that which was to come. Their affinities were not with any society of this world but with the company of angels and of spirits made perfect. The Church on earth was only enduring in patience for a little while until it should be merged in the heavenly army of God's people. In our Gospels, especially in Matthew, Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom is often coloured by the later Church idea; and this is usually set down to a misconception. We are told that what he himself said of the ideal condition in which the will of God would finally prevail is understood of the visible in-

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[1] 1 Cor. i. 7.

[2] Rom. viii. 24.

stitution, and that this confusion was the beginning of disaster. But the truth is that we have here to do with a real element in Christian thought. For the primitive disciples the Church was not a mere earthly society. It was made up of those who would inherit the Kingdom, and no incongruity was felt in transferring the sayings about the Kingdom to the Church. Our ordinary histories of the first age make far too little allowance for the enthusiasm which was the very atmosphere in which the believers lived and moved. In those days immediately succeeding the Lord's death, when his followers were thrilled with the knowledge that he still lived and would shortly return in glory, it was easy to confound the present with the future. In a few weeks or months the Kingdom was visibly to set in, and we need not wonder that it was already thought of as a fact. The partitions between now and hereafter were for the time being almost dissolved. It is a fatal error to conceive of the disciples as meeting in a sort of committee (Peter in the chair) and deciding to form a society, of which they proceeded to draw up the constitution and by-laws.[1] If there is anything certain about the early history, it is that the Church was the creation of a burning enthusiasm. It gave embodiment to glorious hopes which now seemed almost realised. To understand its character ever since we have to remember those volcanic forces which gave it birth.

The Church thus thought of itself as a supernatural community. Its members never doubted that while they lived on earth, subject to earthly conditions, they had part already in that new order which Christ would establish at his coming. The belief might appear a fantastic one, doomed to expire with the passing mood, as millennial excitements have often done since. But it was accompanied with another belief which gave it reality and permanence—the belief in the Spirit.

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[1] Such a view seems to be advocated by M. Loisy in his *Commentary on Acts.*

In Jesus' own teaching, as we know it from the Synoptic Gospels, the idea of the Spirit plays little or no part. The New Testament itself acknowledges that the disciples first became aware of the presence among them of a mysterious power in the days that followed the Lord's death. At one of their meetings, according to the Book of Acts, they were suddenly seized with an uncontrollable impulse which made them "speak with tongues"; and this marvellous phenomenon proved to be one of many. Believers in Christ were lifted above themselves. They exercised gifts of which they had hitherto been unconscious—ecstatic prayer and eloquence, insight into hidden truth, courage and resource in the face of danger. What could this mean but that Christ, now exalted, had sent down on his people that Spirit of God which, according to prophecy, was to be poured out in the last days? The community destined to possess the Kingdom had received the earnest of its inheritance. It was endowed with this divine power through which it participated here on earth in the life of a higher world.

This belief in the Spirit, it must never be forgotten, was intensely real for the early Church, and provides the key to much that is perplexing in its history and institutions. Attempts have been made, from the Reformation onward, to prove that one type or another of later Church polity is identical with that of the primitive Church. Were the Apostles Baptists or Episcopalians or Presbyterians? Or was their position similar to that of our irregular sects, such as the Salvation Army or the Plymouth Brethren? These questions are beside the mark, and the heat and ingenuity spent on them have been merely wasted. For the primitive Church did not in the least resemble any later system. Its very aim was to avoid anything that could be called a system. Earthly societies needed to maintain themselves by a fixed rule, but the Church was not an institution of this age. It belonged to the heavenly order of things, and submitted to no direction but that of the Spirit sent forth from God. On all sides of its life it sought to carry this belief into effect. (1) Its worship was modelled on that of the Synagogue, but a place was given for the exercise of the "spiritual gifts." Each member was supposed to have his special endowment, supernaturally given, and contributed "a psalm, a doctrine, a tongue, an interpretation" as the Spirit moved him.[1] Some were exceptionally gifted, and broke out into the higher form of utterance known as "prophecy." This mode of worship lent itself to many extravagances, but we owe to it in large measure the freshness and variety and sincerity of New Testament thought.[2] It ensured that the gospel should be conceived not as a closed system but as a revelation that was still in process. Each Christian teacher waited for himself on the higher light. He was free to employ his own faculties of insight and sympathy in

[1] 1 Cor. xiv. 26.

[2] The conception of the New Testament as an "inspired" book has a real basis inasmuch as its writers, probably all of them, regarded themselves as inspired by the Spirit. It is tempting to classify them under the three "spiritual" orders of Apostles, Prophets, Teachers.

his apprehension of the truth. When we pass from the New Testament to the later literature we realise at once how much was lost by the quenching of the Spirit.

(2) The government of the Church was likewise determined by the idea of a divine power which controlled all action. There was no set organisation, no official leadership. Some men, indeed, exerted a greater influence than others, but this was due not to any formal status but to their fuller participation in the gifts of the Spirit. A government of this kind was only possible in those early days of glowing enthusiasm, and even then it was not wholly successful. No society can hold together without a settled order, and the history of the Church for the next two centuries is largely occupied with the gradual emergence of an organisation out of the primitive conditions when everything was left to the direction of the Spirit. Yet the feeling persisted that the earlier mode of government was the genuinely Christian one, and that the later development was of the nature of an apostasy. Most of the great schisms and disruptions, from the time of Montanism onward, have owed their strength to this feeling. Over against the conception of a great organised society there has always stood the primitive ideal of a free community of the Spirit.

(3) This ideal expressed itself further in the conviction that all members of the Church were on an equal footing. Jesus had himself declared that his disciples were brethren, but it was the belief in the Spirit which gave practical effect to this side of his teaching. All Christians were supposed to participate in that divine gift which was bestowed on the Church at large. Like members of the body they shared in the one life-principle,

and were necessary one to another.[1] It must be noted, however, that while the doctrine of the Spirit secured equality within the Church, it accentuated the difference between the Church and the world without. The primitive Church has often been described as the first true democracy — the model for all social reconstructions which aim at making men free and equal. This is only partly true. In some respects it would be nearer the mark to think of the Church as an aristocracy. Its members insisted on their equality because they felt themselves separated by a profound gulf from the surrounding world. They constituted an elect order, based not on wealth or earthly privilege, but on possession of the Spirit. On one man it might be bestowed in larger measure than on his fellows, but all Christians, and they alone, had obtained the mysterious gift. The emphasis was laid, as in all privileged orders, not so much on the inner divisions as on the grand distinction from other men which was shared by all the members.

The Church, then, was conscious of itself as a supernatural society. Its lot was thrown in this world, and instead of seeking, like a monastic body, to withdraw itself from the world, it took part in the ordinary activities. To this its missionary achievement was due. Mingling freely with the people around them in all ranks of life the Christians were a pervading influence. It is significant that in the great century of expansion which followed the death of Paul we know the name of hardly any outstanding teacher. The empire was not won over by the effort of great Apostles but by the multitude of ordinary men and women who spread the message as they engaged in the common tasks of life. None the less, while it was in the world the Church was not of the world. It belonged essentially to the age to come, and conceived of itself as governed by a divine power. It was like a fragment of the heavenly order, projected into the sphere of time. Many writers have maintained that this high conception of the Church's calling can only have arisen at a later day, under the influence of a mystical theology. They deem it impossible that an obscure Jewish sect, recruited for the most part from the poor and ignorant, can have advanced those lofty claims at the very beginning. But although the later ideas had their influence, they served only to define and develop a conception which existed from the outset. Indeed, it was only in those early days, under stress of that exalted confidence in the nearness of the Kingdom, that the conception *could* have arisen. It was worked out afterwards as a theological doctrine, but was itself the product of an enthusiastic faith.

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[1] 1 Cor. xii. 12 ff.

We can here recognise that in a true sense Jesus himself was the Founder of the Church. He did not, apparently, foresee its coming. The belief in the Spirit, with which it was so closely identified, was something additional to his own teaching. It may, therefore, be argued that the Church had no direct relation to Jesus. The enthusiasm which took possession of his disciples and gave the impulse to the new society was unknown to them in his lifetime. It arose spontaneously under conditions which he had not anticipated, and was mingled with ideas and imaginations which had little or no place in his thought. Yet the men of the early Church were profoundly right when they saw in the Spirit not merely the gift of Jesus but his distinctive gift. There was something in his message quite apart from any of the new truths and principles he had revealed. What he had imparted to his followers was a living power, of which they had first become fully conscious after his death. Through him they had become capable of a larger vision and activity. They had been lifted out of themselves and had entered on a new life. This, which was the central but indefinable fact in his work, they made real to themselves by the conception of a Spirit, given from on high. To this day we have not been able to advance on this conception which grew out of the experience of the primitive Church. When we ask ourselves what Christ accomplished, what is the ultimate secret of his religion, we are compelled to fall back on that belief of his first disciples—that through him we have the life-giving Spirit.

Thus in the creation of the Church the vital influences proceeded from Jesus himself. He had made the hope of the Kingdom a reality, so that his followers could henceforth regard themselves as heirs to it—the representatives on earth of a heavenly order. He had inspired them with the sense of a new power working in them and to make it effectual in the life of the world they formed themselves into a society, different in character from all others. These were the real forces which called the Church into being. They acted under given conditions, and apart from these we cannot understand the manner in which the Church developed and the form which it eventually assumed. But to contend that these factors were the primary ones is to confound the issue. The Church, while it grew up in a certain historical environment and was moulded by it, was the outcome of the Christian message.

Sometimes it is said that Christianity did not originate the idea of the Church, but found it already there. As the very name "the Ecclesia" implies, the disciples simply took over the conception of Israel as the chosen people of God, and transferred it, with some modifications, to the new society. In this view there is undoubtedly a large measure of truth. Without the Jewish conception, especially as it had been presented by the Prophets, the Church would have found no historical basis. Even the loftiest ideas of its calling had been partly anticipated in the prophetic vision of the true Israel. "It shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it. And many peoples shall say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and he shall teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."[1] As we read such words we feel that the essential idea of a holy community, representing the cause of God on earth, was clearly present to the highest minds of Israel, centuries before the time of Christ. But there is a world of difference between the adumbration of an idea and its expression in actual fact. The Prophets themselves admit that as yet they can see no sign of their ideal Israel; and as time went on, the conception of a spiritual community, drawing all men to the true service of God, merged almost entirely in that of the favoured race, intent on its own exaltation. No world-wide church could ever have developed out of any possible mode of Jewish nationalism. The Christian Ecclesia owed its being to an altogether new impulse. Something had now been given which changed the imagination of the Prophets into a reality. This was the creative achievement, and it was only made possible through the work of Christ.

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[1] Isa. ii. 2, 3; Mic. iv. 1, 2.

In our own day two factors have come into prominence as co-operating with the prophetic conception of the new Israel. (1) Attention has been directed, on the one hand, to the groups which formed themselves in connection with the Eastern cults. It is maintained that from the time of its entrance into the Gentile world Christianity was assimilated to these religions, to which it bore at least a superficial resemblance. Jesus ceased to be regarded as Teacher or Messiah, and became in the full sense a divinity. His votaries combined in associations for the purpose of worshipping him, and were only admitted, as in the cults, after the performance of mystical rites. The cities of the empire were already familiar with the initiates of Isis and Attis. Now there arose a new group—the "Christians" or votaries of Christ. Those who shared in his mysteries were bound together in a close brotherhood, which finally took shape as the Church.[1] Now it is more than probable, as we shall see later, that some developments in Christianity were affected by the example of the cults. But their influence has certainly been exaggerated, and with the formation of the Christian society they had little to do. For one thing, there is no indication that the idea of fellowship played any considerable part in those mystery religions. The one object sought by the initiate was the assurance of his personal salvation. He might regard himself as bound by a sacred tie to the priest who initiated him. He might join with his fellowinitiates in stated meals and solemn observances. But it does not appear that there was much sense of community even among members of the same local group, while the different groups stood entirely separate. From the very fact that the same man was frequently a devotee of several cults it is evident that there can have been no strong feeling of union. In the Church the element of fellowship was essential. Each company of believers was a family of "brethren"; it regarded itself as only a part of the one Church, scattered over many lands. The name of Christ was an all-powerful bond which compelled all believers to help each other, though they might personally be strangers. Again, the Pagan groups existed solely for purposes of worship. Their members may often have been drawn into relations of friendship by their common religious interest, but this was no part of the design. For Christians there was no distinction between the religious and the social brotherhood. The purpose of the weekly meeting was to ensure fellowship not only with God and with Christ but with the brethren, so that it is often difficult to tell whether the word "communion" is used in the religious or the human sense.[1] Perhaps both meanings are implied; for one of the chief objects of the Church was to create the attitude of mind in which love to God and love to the brethren were fused together. It must be confessed that of the so-called "mystery" associations we know very little; but from all that we can gather they were different, in their whole aim and character, from the Christian communities. They may have contributed a few elements, mainly on the sacramental side, to the formation of the Church. The attempt to make out that it was somehow derived from them cannot seriously be considered.

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[1] This is the general thesis of Bousset in his *Kyrios Christus*, and has been developed by Loisy, *Les Mystères paiens et le Mystère chrétien.*

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[1] The most striking instance of this ambiguity is in the familiar words of the Benediction. "Fellowship of the Holy Spirit" may mean participation in the Spirit or communion of the brethren with each other through the Spirit.

(2) The same may be said of another effort to discover a Pagan origin for the Church. There is abundant evidence that the age was one in which societies of every kind found a favourable soil.[1] In all the great cities we hear of trade guilds, burial clubs, fraternities which sprang up for every conceivable object. Under the levelling power of Rome the old civic and national interests had disappeared. A great monotony had spread over human life, and those associations had come into being in the effort to relieve it. In his little society the ordinary man could find an outlet for unsatisfied instincts and ambitions. He could assert himself as a human being within a system in which he had become no more than a mechanical unit. It has sometimes been maintained that the Christian communities were modelled on the guilds, and that the separate groups which arose at various centres were finally merged in the world-wide brotherhood. In this theory there is much that is true and important. When the Church began to organise itself it seems to have taken many suggestions from the friendly societies.[2] It learned from them how to distribute its offices and conduct its financial business. It probably availed itself of the privileges which were granted them, and was thus protected from interference on the part of the jealous Roman law. Not only so, but the rapid extension of the Church is largely to be accounted for by that craving for association which was one of the notable

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[1] The subject is fully discussed in Dill's *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius.*

[2] This was first recognised by Hatch (*Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages in the Christian Church* (1888)).

characteristics of the age. Everywhere men were feeling the need for fellowship, and no society offered so many advantages as this Christian one, which cared for its members in sickness, found them employment and rescued them from the debtors' prison, surrounded them with human kindness when they were living and provided for their orphans when they died.[1] We are apt to think of the "institutional Church" as a peculiar product of our time, and good people are sometimes a little suspicious of it on this account. But the primitive Church was "institutional" to a far greater extent than any Church to-day, and this was one main secret of its success. In that ruthless age, when life was deprived of so many of its natural sources of happiness, the Church afforded a shelter, and a sphere for pleasant friendships and activities. Multitudes who perhaps made little of the Christian religion could at least appreciate the charm of the Christian brotherhood. But even on this side of its life the Church borrowed nothing from the Pagan associations except the mechanism for mutual helpfulness. The idea which it sought to put into action was part of its Christian inheritance. Jesus had impressed on his disciples that they were brethren, who owed love and service to one another. It was this spirit of charity, born of faith in Christ, which tried to embody itself in the organised Church.

We are justified, then, in regarding the Church as the direct outcome of the new religion. Various influences went towards its development—the Old Testament conception of a holy people, the apocalyptic idea of a community that would inherit the coming age, suggestions from the religious and secular associations in the Pagan world. The Church, as it grew to maturity, was moulded at every point by such influences; but the force which brought it into being and made use of all the contributory factors was that which came from the new revelation. The Church, indeed, was itself the fullest expression of the meaning of that revelation. Jesus had set himself not merely to proclaim the Kingdom of God, but to hasten its coming. He had looked for a time when the will of God would be done on earth as it is in heaven, and had sought to make this higher will effectual in man's present life. The Church was the endeavour to realise this purpose of Jesus. It stood forth in the world of time as the supernatural society, the embodiment of a higher spiritual order. It bore witness to the faith that while men live out their lives on earth they are children of God, and must conform, even in their common aims and daily intercourse, to other than earthly standards. This is still the vital idea of the Church. It no longer conceives of itself in an apocalyptic sense as the community of elect souls whose true citizenship is in heaven, but it still claims to uphold that cause of God which will finally triumph. Outwardly a society like any other, it stands for the invisible things, for the ideal order, and aims at fulfilling this order in the world's actual life. In its fundamental idea the Church has always been, as it was in the early days, the outpost of that Kingdom of God which was announced by Jesus. This idea has defined itself under many changing forms, borrowed from historical conditions, but in its essence it sprang directly out of the new Christian message.[1]

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[1] Cf. Harnack's *Mission and Expansion of Christianity*; cf. especially books ii. and iii.

At the same time, the existence of the Church reacted in many important respects on the message. From the very outset the history of Christianity has been mainly determined by the fact that the gospel as proclaimed by Jesus was mediated by the Church. There are those who hold that for this reason it has always been obscured and perverted. The theory was widely current in the eighteenth century that all degradation of moral and spiritual ideas had been due to a deliberate conspiracy on the part of the Church. A system of teaching originally pure had been exploited by "priestcraft" in the interests of a self-seeking tyrannical organisation. With our better historical knowledge we have long ago discarded this crude hypothesis. We recognise that the Church, even in its worst times, has misrepresented the gospel more through ignorance and foolishness than from any intent to deceive. But the view is still put forward, and sometimes accepted as self-evident, that the Church as an institution was incapable of transmitting a spiritual message. It had too many interests to consider. It required to adapt the gospel to the needs and capacities of a miscellaneous society, and in so doing weakened and half-destroyed it. What we now call Christianity is not the religion taught by Jesus but a system that was evolved through a long series of compromises by the official Church. This view, it must be acknowledged, is not wholly false. As the religion of a church, Christianity did, in some respects, change its character, and fell short of the purpose of Jesus.

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[1] Cf. Leckie, *The Vocation of the Church*, ch. vi. (a singularly fine and penetrating discussion).

(1) For one thing, the formation of the society could not but involve a certain loss of freedom. If a great number of people are to work together, they must be willing to adjust themselves to given rules, they must sacrifice many of the aims which they cherish as individuals. This, from the outset, was the necessity

laid on the Church. It was obliged to consult the good of the greatest number. For the sake of harmony it had to accept interpretations of the gospel which did not satisfy its best instincts. In spite of its reliance on the Spirit it early learned to direct faith along given channels, and to put a check on sincere movements Before the close of the first century Christian thought was beginning to lose its spontaneity. Everything had to be subordinated to the need of maintaining the Church.

(2) In like manner. the organised society made for externalism. Few minds are capable of apprehending spiritual ideas in their purity, and the gospel had to be presented in such a manner that the majority could respond to it. When we pass from the writings of Paul even to later New Testament books, such as the Pastoral Epistles or the Epistle of James, we are conscious of a decline. Profound ideas, adapted to the understanding of the Church, have become formal and sometimes commonplace. This was the more inevitable as the Church was increasingly composed of members converted from Paganism, who were unfitted by their previous training for genuine insight into the Christian message. It is only too apparent that the great expansion of the Church in the second and third centuries went hand in hand with a growing externalism.

(3) The progress of the Church brought with it the further necessity that the gospel had to be construed in a statutory form. For Jesus himself the one thing that mattered was the new will, and Paul took up this great conception, and declared that for Christians the Law had been done away. He imagined a society that should be held together not by any prescribed rules, but by the Spirit which dwelt in all the members and kept them true to the mind of Christ. But such a society

proved impossible An organised community must be based on a settled order, and Paul had no sooner won his apparent victory than the Church fell back, by another path, into legalism. A time came when the belief in the Spirit, which in the first days had meant everything, was virtually abandoned. The Church itself assumed the right, through its official leaders, to prescribe what every Christian must do and believe.

Yet there was another side to the influence of the Church. It would have been sad indeed if an institution which had grown inevitably out of the gospel should have had no other effect than to distort it. But the very opposite is true. The aim of the Church was to give actuality to the teaching of Jesus, and in the main it succeeded. At a later stage we shall have to consider this matter more fully, but several of the chief points may here be emphasised.

(1) It was the Church which gave reality to those social and ethical ideas which belonged to the very essence of Jesus' teaching. Without it they might have led to a vague humanitarian sentiment, such as we find in not a few modern movements which have ostentatiously broken loose from organised Christianity. But as members of an actual society the believers were faced with concrete duties. Here was a definite field where they could exercise the charity and forgiveness and helpfulness which they professed. Their worship of God was made inseparable from their obligations to this visible group of His people. It is strange to hear, as we often do in these days, that Jesus proclaimed a social message which the Church has sedulously concealed, and which is now being recovered in spite of it. The very purpose of the Church, and in no time has it been wholly forgotten, was to enforce the social message.

(2) It was the Church that safeguarded what was central in Christian thought and practice. Even in New Testament times the principle of liberty had begun to work strange results. The gospel was interpreted differently by all the different teachers, and was sometimes confounded with purely heathen speculations. There was a grave danger that amidst the multitude of sects and parties it might disappear altogether. What saved the religion was the Christian society. Behind all individual teachers was the mind of the Church, which was often impervious to new light, but which also opposed itself to all doubtful theory. This has been true, likewise, in all times since. The Church has interfered with liberty. It has stood for old dogmas and traditions long after they have served their day. On the other hand, it has always preserved the instinct for those things which were genuinely Christian.

(3) It was through the Church that the new movement was kept in living relation with the surrounding world, and was able finally to transform it. This Christian community included men of every class and calling. Its interests were interwoven, as those of a great society must always be, with those of the general mass. For the outward progress of the gospel this was all-important; and it was hardly less so for the inward development. Represented as it was by this miscellaneous body, the religion was kept open to all the prevailing currents of thought. It was brought face to face with the practical needs and difficulties of the time, and was compelled to find some answer to them. If the interpretation of the gospel had been left wholly to solitary thinkers, however gifted, the result would have been a philosophy or a mystical piety, with little bearing on man's ordinary life. But besides the theologians there was the general mind

of the Church. It may not have thought deeply. At many points it may have misconstrued the message. But it ensured that Christian beliefs should in some manner correspond with the realities of human experience.

(4) Finally, this society, which remained stable while men came and went, provided a sort of reservoir into which all streams could flow. The faith of the Church, as it exists to-day, is strangely composite. Some elements in it have come down from the ancient world, some from the Middle Ages, some from the Reformation and the centuries later. Not a generation has passed without contributing something to what we now call the religion of Christ. To many this appears to be its grand defect. They think of it as crusted over with layer upon layer of bygone tradition, and would like to have it purified—restored, as they say, to its pristine simplicity. But on a deeper view we may surely hold that this inclusion of many elements in our religion is its glory. It stands not only for what Jesus taught, or his Apostles after him, but for all the highest thoughts and pieties and aspirations of two thousand years. Everything that has entered into it has made, in some way, for its enrichment, and has enabled it to offer a wider response to the needs and longings of mankind. This catholicity of the Christian message is due to the Church.

CHAPTER V

THE HELLENISTIC INFLUENCE

Within a generation after Jesus' death Christianity had become definitely a Gentile religion. Its chief missionaries were men of Gentile birth and culture, and its converts were drawn in ever greater measure from the miscellaneous population of the Gentile cities. This attraction of the Gentiles to the new religion went hand in hand with a growing alienation of the Jews. At first, in spite of strong opposition from the ruling classes, the Jewish people had been responsive. The missionaries were welcomed in synagogues, and could feel justified in their hope that after a brief interval Israel would come in.[1] But the attitude of sympathy, or at least of toleration, gradually changed into one of hostility. The Church was compelled to turn from the Jews and identify itself with the Gentiles.

It is sometimes held that the religion which was accepted by the Gentile world was Christian only in name. At an early stage the gospel had undergone a transformation. The sanction of Jesus was transferred to a system of ideas entirely foreign to him. On a superficial view there is much to be said in support of this theory. But while it may be granted that Christianity early became Hellenised, and would otherwise have remained exotic in the world of Hellenism, there are abundant signs that before this process had begun, Gentiles had been drawn to the new religion. Even in the first days at Jerusalem it had made numerous converts among the "Hellenists," the Greek-speaking Jews who had grown up among the foreign influences. Before Paul had entered on his mission and while the elder Apostles were still convinced that the message was solely intended for Israel, Gentiles were finding their way into the Church. When once the barrier of legal observance had been broken down, their response was immediate and overwhelming. It is manifest that Christianity won its triumph not because of the new forms in which it was presented, but by something inherent in the message itself.

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[1] Rom. xi. 25, 26.

What was it in the gospel that gave it this power of appeal? The answer is apparent to every one who will read Paul's letters, addressed as they are to Gentile churches, with an impartial mind. Paul thinks along Hellenistic lines, but the ideas which he always keeps in the centre are those on which Jesus himself had insisted. He speaks with passionate conviction of the love and grace of God, the certainty of salvation, the supremacy of the spiritual things, the value of the individual soul. These are the compelling elements in his message, and are independent, in the last resort, of his doctrinal speculations. Above all, the story of Jesus himself had an irresistible power. It is often said that the Jesus who attracted the Gentiles was not the historical Person but the divine Lord, clothed with theological attributes, who had taken his place. We must not forget, however, that our Gospels were written in Greek, for Greek-speaking Christians. They were by far the most widely read of all Christian books, and gave rise to a whole literature of apocryphal Gospels, which professed to give further details of the life of

Jesus, from his infancy to his Resurrection. It is absurd to say that the public which demanded this literature had no interest in the historical Jesus. For Gentiles and Jews alike he was the supreme object of interest. If a mythology was woven around him by the popular imagination, this did not mean that he had become unreal. It was a tribute, rather, to the overpowering impression which the story of his life had made.

The gospel, then, had forced its way into the Gentile world while it was still proclaimed under the original Jewish forms. Far too much has often been made of the difficulty which those forms presented. We need to remember, for one thing, that the apocalyptic ideas which Jesus had employed were not peculiarly Jewish. They had entered Judaism from that Babylonian and Persian world of thought by which all ancient religion had been influenced, and many counterparts to them can be found in Greek and Roman literature. The Gentile public was already familiar with the notions of a future Judgment, a destruction of the present order, a new and better age in which righteousness would prevail.[1] At many points the Christian scheme, with its Old Testament colouring, would appear strange, but it would not be unintelligible. For that part, the very element of strangeness in the new beliefs would make them the more attractive. It is a curious fallacy, prevalent in our time, that if religion is to make its due appeal it ought to be stripped of everything that is in any way peculiar ; nothing should be done in worship which the plain man cannot at once understand. But the religious instinct in all ages has demanded forms which are removed from those of common life, and which thereby awaken the imagination and the sense of reverence. This was true in the ancient world even more than now. Religion was everywhere associated with far-off times and mysterious places. The forms in which it clothed itself were all designed to lift men's minds as far as possible out of the environment of their everyday lives. Christianity was admittedly a new religion ; but for this very reason it neglected no means within its reach of throwing an air of remoteness about its message. This is apparent even in the language of the New Testament, and especially of the Gospels. We are often told that they were written for the people, in the ordinary colloquial speech of the time, but this is only half the truth. It is noticeable that the evangelists are careful to preserve the Aramaic turns of expression, and now and then to throw in some actual word or phrase of the foreign language. They were aware that these Oriental touches would lend impressiveness to their story.[1] Their readers would be more responsive to the words of Jesus when in the language itself there was something removed from the common world. In like manner, full use was made of the apocalyptic imagery. Much of it to the Western mind would convey little meaning, but instead of avoiding the New Testament, writers are often at pains to heighten it. They know that their message will make its appeal all the more powerfully when it is set forth in those old Hebrew symbols. We are not to think of the Hellenising process as an attempt to substitute Greek ideas for Jewish. The original apocalyptic forms were never abandoned; they remain an integral part of Christianity to this day. The Hellenising came about, rather, through the effort to interpret the primitive ideas. They were retained as they had come down in the tradition, but what did they signify ? What message did they convey when you sought to penetrate through the form to the essential meaning ?

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[1] Cf. the magnificent picture in the *Fourth Eclogue* of Virgil.

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[1] This point is well made by Bacon (*The Gospel of Mark*, ch. xvi.).

We have here to reckon with a belief which played an all-important part in the religious thinking of the first century. It was assumed that in all revelation there was a hidden import which had to be sought out and explained. In earlier times religion had consisted almost wholly in stated observances. Certain ritual acts had to be performed because a divine power demanded them. What they meant it was needless and even unlawful to inquire; the worshipper's one duty was to observe them scrupulously. With the advance of reflection this attitude became impossible, and the theory grew up that all religious rites, all myths and customs which had come down from antiquity, were part of a primeval revelation. Profound truths had been communicated in those apparently unmeaning forms, and men were required to pierce through the vehicle to the secret wisdom. The Jewish Rabbis applied this principle in their interpretation of Scripture. They reasoned that since Scripture was divinely inspired it everywhere contained hidden intimations of the mind of God, and that these were to be discovered by means of a peculiar exegetical method. Each sentence and word, even each individual letter, must be examined, as it were, under the microscope, and the truth concealed in it would spring to light. Among the Greeks the method followed was that of philosophical speculation. Plato had set the example of allegorising the ancient myths, employing them as an imaginative setting for some of his highest intuitions. His method was developed in the later thinking into something like a regular system. It was taken for granted that all religious traditions and customs were nothing else than a veiled philosophy. They offered a challenge to the insight which could discern in them the key to a sublimer knowledge.

Christianity entered a world in which this was the accepted belief. It came with the announcement of certain facts which meant salvation to men, and it demanded an act of faith—of heart-felt assent to those facts. But with this the mind of the age was not satisfied. Since Christianity professed to be a revelation it must convey "the wisdom of God in a mystery." [1] In the given facts there must be implications which it was necessary to explore and bring to light. All the religious thinking of the time was based on this presumption, which in the case of Christianity was strengthened by two special considerations.

(1) In the first place, it was evident that the Christian truths were profound and many-sided. Pagan myths, Jewish traditions and customs, required to have the deeper meaning forced into them; in the Christian beliefs it was plainly there. No one could accept them without a sense that he had come in contact with the divine. There was a significance in these truths which he could feel even if he could not explain it. (2) Again, the idea of the Spirit, which governed the practical life of the early Church, was also cardinal for Christian thinking. It was believed that every Christian man was endowed with a supernatural power. In virtue of it he possessed an insight whereby he could enter into the mind of God. He could apprehend the truths

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[1] 1 Cor. ii. 7.

of his religion not only by faith but with this knowledge imparted to him by the Spirit.

We can thus understand how the message, almost from the beginning, underwent a process of interpretation which in great measure transformed it. This process had already commenced in Jewish Christianity. The work of Christ was explained in the light of Old Testament predictions, most notably the great prophecy of the Suffering Servant of God in the second Isaiah.[1] As a result of such interpretation the original beliefs took on a new significance. They began to unfold themselves, even in the earliest years, into theological doctrines. With the rise of the Gentile mission the process was carried much further, and was turned in a new direction. The explanation now followed the lines of Hellenistic thought. Conceptions were applied to the work of Christ, which were derived, more or less consciously, from the general religious thinking of the time.

To understand the nature of this development it is necessary to form for ourselves some idea of spiritual conditions in that Roman world of the first century. In every respect the period was a remarkable one, perhaps the most remarkable that has ever been. As we look back on it we can perceive a literal truth in the claim of the Apostles that in their time "the ends of the ages had met."[2] In that century there was a confluence of all the streams which had hitherto flowed separate, and from this merging of all the diverse cultures the world took a fresh beginning. The age is for ever memorable for two great creations—the Roman Empire and Christianity. In the Empire all the political movement of the earlier time found its consummation. In like manner it might be said that Christianity gathered into itself all the results of the world's spiritual progress.

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[1] Cf. the frequent application to Jesus of the title παῖς θεοῦ in the early chapters of Acts.

[2] 1 Cor. x. 11.

Within the great Empire, then, the nations had fused together. From the beginning of history there had been conquerors who had sought to impose unity on a number of various races, but their systems had been artificial, and had broken down as soon as the constraining force was removed. Alexander the Great had at last conceived the idea of an empire that should be inwardly united, and a wonderful instrument for this purpose was offered him in the Greek culture. It was so obviously superior to all others that the subject nations willingly accepted it, and within a century after the conqueror's death the whole East had been Hellenised. The work begun by Alexander was completed, on a far greater scale, under the Romans. With their genius for government they imposed a common system of law and administration. They established a peace which enabled the most diverse races to hold intercourse with one another and to commingle in great cosmopolitan cities. At the same time, they availed themselves of the Greek culture, which was now dominant in the West as it had long been in the East. Over the whole vast Empire the Greek language was current; Greek literature was the basis of education; the teaching of Greek philosophy moulded all thought and morals.

The process of fusion was carried out in every department of life, and nowhere was it more conspicuous than in the sphere of religion. At various periods in history, when two or more rival religions have come in close contact with each other, we have the result which is known as Syncretism. The first century stands out pre-eminently as the age of Syncretism—of the merging of different religions in a composite type of religion. The phenomenon is one which is hardly possible in the modern world. The great religions of to-day—Christianity, Islam, Hinduism—cannot exist side by side without sharp opposition. But the old Pagan religions had all a common basis in nature-worship, and arrived without much difficulty at a mutual understanding. The general religious attitude in ancient times was one of tolerance. Since the existence of many gods was everywhere admitted, it was impossible to doubt the reality of other gods than your own. You were careful not to offend them, and were ready on occasion to invoke their help and join in their worship. It followed that when a number of religions were thrown into close neighbourhood in the great cities, each of them freely borrowed from the others. Greeks and Romans had already discovered that they worshipped the same gods under different names, and this principle was now extended to other cults. The belief was entertained, more and more consciously, that all religions were ultimately one, and were destined to unite in one common religion.

In natural course this blending of the different Pagan cults could only have resulted in a confused and meaningless superstition. Each of them separately had its tradition, and stood for a given type of culture and belief. When they were all jumbled together they ceased to have any value, either spiritually or socially. But into this compound of religions there entered the leaven of Greek speculation. It vitalised the syncretism, and was itself quickened by it. Hellenistic religion owed its significance to the interaction of those two factors.

During the five centuries before Christ, the work of philosophical inquiry had been eagerly pressed forward in the Greek countries. The Greek spirit was, above all things, rational. As the Hebrews had an instinctive feeling for a moral order in the world, so the Greeks had a sense for a rational order. They set themselves to *know*, believing that only through knowledge man could make himself at home in the universe. This confidence in reason was the chief characteristic of the Greek genius, and has been its priceless gift to the race. It was the Greeks who taught us that the system of things is rational, and that man holds the key to it in his own intelligence.

This faith in reason, however, had in the first century suffered an eclipse. Philosophy had been striving by its own methods to discover an answer to the ultimate problems, and the effort had too evidently resulted in failure. It was felt increasingly that along the old paths no further progress could be made. In earlier days philosophy had divorced itself from religion. Confident in its own power, it had denounced the old myths as false and mischievous, and Stoicism had boldly substituted the Logos, the pervading principle of Reason, for God. But in its new mood of disillusionment philosophy sought aid from religion. It did so the more readily as the religions now coming in from the East had a spiritual depth which was wanting in Greek and Roman Paganism. To be sure, they were crude, and might often appear childish or forbidding, yet at the heart of them lay vague ideas of wonderful suggestiveness. Above all, they offered the promise of a redemption into a new life. Growing originally out of the annual festival which celebrated the revival of vegetation after the blight of winter, they had found a spiritual meaning in the natural miracle. It became the symbol of an inward renewal, of the rising of the soul to a higher life. In such beliefs, associated with the Oriental religions, philosophy could find points of attachment for some of its loftiest speculations.

We have to reckon, therefore, with a twofold movement in the thought of the age. (1) On the one hand, philosophy fell back on the ideas implicit in religion. Even when it affected to despise the prevailing beliefs, it tacitly made use of their presuppositions. It recognised the existence of a higher realm of truth, of which the mind by its own natural light could render no account. It allowed room, in like manner, for new methods of knowledge. By means of rapture or direct illumination the mind might attain to that higher truth which lay beyond the reach of reason. (2) On the other hand, religion sought to explain and justify itself by philosophical speculation. It was evident to intelligent men that the traditional rites and myths were in themselves of little value. But they were not to be understood in a crudely literal sense. They constituted a cipher to which a key was wanted, and this was provided by philosophical thought. The religious data, when viewed under the light of Stoic or Platonic speculation, would be found to convey meanings of the profoundest import. This rationalising process was made easier by the prevailing syncretism. When it was assumed that all religions were aiming at the same truth, when the conflicting types of faith had merged in certain common beliefs, philosophy and religion were able to come together. It was understood that, although the gods were many, the same Power was worshipped under various names, and it could be no other than the absolute being which was also the supreme object of philosophy.

Formerly it was supposed that, in the days when Paul set forth on his mission, the religious sentiment in Europe was practically dead. This, indeed, was adduced as one of the prime causes of the success of the mission. There was a great void of which all men were obscurely conscious. They welcomed the new message, which filled the emptiness of life like a mighty rushing wind. This theory, however, was, on the face of it, a highly dubious one. In all times the mood of indifference or of crass materialism has offered a fatal obstacle to the entrance of the gospel. Before they can respond to it, men must be religiously awake. We have now come to recognise, as a fact of history, that in the first century the religious sense was peculiarly active, and that this was the real secret of the progress of the mission. In the previous age, when philosophy still claimed to be all-sufficient, religion had been largely abandoned by educated men. Their attitude to it was at best that cynical one which Paul encountered among the Stoics and Epicureans at Athens. But in the later period all thought was taking a religious direction. Philosophy had learned to perceive its limitations, and instead of repressing the religious mood, had become the prime agent in its diffusion. It must be remembered that all education in that age was based on philosophy. To an extent which it is now difficult to realise, men were familiar with philosophical ideas, and eagerly discussed them. From the circles of the learned, philosophy had made its way among the masses, much as science is now popularised by newspapers and common talk. Readers of the New Testament have often wondered what the very ordinary people who composed the churches in Rome and Corinth can have made of the theological argument in Paul's Epistles. But we have to conceive of a time when all men gave themselves to speculation, which, indeed, was the only field of larger interest left open to them after the suppression of civic liberty. That Paul should discuss the Christian beliefs in those abstract terms was nothing strange. All religious teachers were doing the same thing. The thinking of the time ran in a philosophical channel, and a certain acquaintance with the terms and postulates of metaphysic was expected as a matter of course in seriously minded men. It would never occur to Paul that his passages of speculative argument might be over the heads of his readers. His very purpose in writing them was to make his thought about the gospel more fully intelligible.

In the Hellenistic world, then, a number of conditions had worked together to produce a type of religion which was different from any other before or since. Out of various cults there had developed a strangely composite scheme of belief and practice, and this in turn had been interfused with ideas derived from Greek philosophical speculation. All through the years when it was taking definite shape, Christianity was exposed to the peculiar spiritual atmosphere of that time, and ever since it has preserved the character impressed on it by its early environment. We have now to consider in a little more detail the distinctive features of that Hellenistic type of religion.

It had its central motive in that longing for Redemption which, in one form or another, must underlie all religion. Man is conscious that while he lives on earth he is withheld from his true being. He feels himself destined for a world of freedom and more abundant life, and chafes against the bondage to which he has been condemned. What he seeks from religion is always, in some sense, a deliverance. But in the first century the bondage and the deliverance were both conceived of in a peculiar way.

(1) It was realised, in the first place, that the bondage was due, in large measure, to ignorance. Socrates had taught that man could liberate himself only by shaking off all false conceptions, and ever afterwards knowledge had been the watchword of Greek thought. Redemption through knowledge had been the grand aim of philosophy. But in the later days, when the confidence in purely rational processes had broken down, a new meaning was given to knowledge. To be truly effectual it must be something more than an activity of man's reason. The knowledge that saves must come by revelation, by direct enlightenment from above. The word "Gnosis," which in earlier times had denoted knowledge in general, was now invested with a special significance. It was a knowledge supernaturally given, and directed to those mysteries of the invisible world to which man's reason by itself cannot attain. In popular usage the word often degenerated into a name for magic. In its higher sense it stood for mystical contemplation. The sage was conscious that at rare moments he was illuminated; he had communion with the nameless power that was behind all existence. By such *knowledge* of the higher life he came himself to have part in it. "This is life eternal," says the Fourth Gospel, "to know Thee, the only true God." [1] In such words we hear the authentic accents of Hellenistic thought.

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[1] John xvii. 3.

(2) The bondage under which man suffers is that of material existence. Greek thinking, ever since Plato, had laid emphasis on the dualism in human life. The soul is by nature divine, and belongs to the higher world, but it finds itself imprisoned in the body, subject to the earthly conditions. How can it raise itself out of this bondage and lay hold of its true birthright? In the classical period the material was thought of merely as limitation, but later, as a result of Oriental influence, it was regarded as positively evil. The soul, in consequence of some primal error or catastrophe, had fallen out of its native sphere and was sunk in the visible material order. This is the radical cause of all human misery. Our ignorance, our moral weakness, all the troubles that weigh upon us, are due to the material existence into which we are born. How can we rise out of the lower plane and attain to that life which belongs to spiritual beings?

(3) Once more, deliverance was sought from the bondage of Necessity. The conception of an overmastering Fate, to which the gods themselves were subject, had now been established on what seemed to be a rational basis. Greek intelligence had taken over the astrological ideas of Babylon, and had worked them into an elaborate system. It was assumed that every man was born under a particular star, which henceforth controlled his life. His whole action was determined for him beforehand. He was encompassed by iron forces from which there was no escape. This sense of an inevitable destiny governing man's life contributed, perhaps more than anything else, to that mood of hopelessness which oppressed the mind of antiquity. It was the ancient counterpart to that pessimism which affects much of our thought to-day as a result of modern scien-

tific theory. Then, as now, the free action of will seemed to be an illusion. The world revealed itself as a network of mechanical laws which held man completely at their mercy. Yet, in spite of all, man had in him the unquenchable desire for freedom. How was it to be realised ?

It needs to be repeated that these conceptions, rooted in the philosophy of the time, were no longer confined to thinkers. They had come to permeate the whole mass of ancient society. There was a universal feeling that man, by the very conditions of his life, was held in bondage. In the minds of the uneducated it frequently took the form of a belief in demons—the personified agents of those tyrannical powers which controlled the world. It followed that the whole bent of first-century religion was metaphysical. Since the misery of human life was inherent in its very conditions, ethical ideas could play only an incidental part. There must be a change in the constitution of man's nature. Earthly existence must be transmuted into something different. Among the more earnest spirits of the time there was certainly a deep sense of moral failure. The Stoics especially insisted on righteousness with a zeal which reminds us of the Hebrew prophets. But it was recognised that moral error was only the symptom of a profounder evil. Not the will merely but the nature must be redeemed.

When Christianity passed over into the Gentile world it seems almost at once to have transformed itself into a Gentile religion. That this should have happened so quickly has often appeared surprising, and not a little suspicious. The missionaries, it is argued, must have known how widely their gospel differed from that which had been proclaimed by Jesus. They must have made the change deliberately in order to conciliate the Gentiles. But we must remember that Paul and his companions were themselves Hellenists, whose religion had taken on a Hellenistic colour long before they became Christians. It is significant that in the great passages where he gives passionate utterance to his own deepest convictions Paul is most Hellenistic. He had made no conscious effort to reinterpret the gospel. Of its own accord it had presented itself in a new light when it was approached from the Hellenistic point of view. What was the nature of this change which the Christian teaching underwent in the course of the Gentile mission? It can best be understood when we bear in mind those characteristics of first-century religion which have just been noted.

(1) In the first place, the salvation which Christ had brought was now conceived in the Hellenistic manner. Originally it had related itself to the Jewish apocalyptic scheme. A new age was about to dawn in which God would reign, and it would be introduced by a Judgment. According to their faith in Jesus and their obedience to his new rule of life, men would be pronounced worthy of God's favour. They would be rescued from the dominion of Satan and the miseries of the present age, and would enter into the coming Kingdom. These apocalyptic ideas were still preserved, but were now combined with others, native to Hellenistic thought. According to this new reading of the gospel, men were imprisoned in the lower world, and longed to escape from ignorance, from the material conditions, from the grinding weight of Necessity. They desired a liberty not only in the future but here on earth. If Christ was the Redeemer, he must offer this present

liberty. Salvation must consist not merely in a deliverance at the coming Judgment but in the attainment, even now, of a new kind of life.

(2) Again, the new life was conceived metaphysically, in terms of essence. For Hellenistic thought all evil was due to the conditions of earthly existence. It was taken for granted that unless some change was effected in the constitution of man's nature, all effort at moral regeneration was futile. In the teaching of Jesus we hear nothing of this natural incapacity for the higher life. For Jesus the source of all evil is the perversion of the will, and his aim is to renew the will. Man is a child of God, made in God's image, and has wilfully lost his birthright. By returning to the Father and casting himself on His love and forgiveness, he may yet recover it. To the Hellenistic mind this ethical gospel was imperfect. It was regarded as self-evident, and this conviction was to dominate all Christian thought for centuries, that there must be something prior to the renewal of the will. Men cannot return to God without a change of nature. There must be a "birth from above," in the sense that our life, in its very principle, becomes spiritual instead of earthly. The work of Christ is to make possible this radical change.

(3) A peculiar emphasis was laid on knowledge. In the teaching of Jesus knowledge has a place hardly less important than in Hellenistic thought, but it is a different kind of knowledge. Men are blind to the true character of God, and to the nature of the service He requires. Jesus set himself to enlighten them. He revealed to them the Fatherly Will of God. He sought to make plain to them the meaning of righteousness, and the conditions which make for peace and true well-being. The Hellenistic mind was bent on a knowledge of *mysteries*. What is the origin of the soul? What is

the divine essence as distinguished from the human? What is the nature of those realities which lie beyond sense and reason? Man is what he knows, and the path to true life must therefore consist in a higher knowledge. To hold fellowship with God must depend on knowing Him in the mystery of His being. So in the Gentile world Christian thinkers conceived of Jesus as one in whom the divine nature was incarnated. God Himself is beyond our knowledge, but through Christ we can apprehend Him. We have insight into His being and His secret counsels. In this illumination which comes to us by the knowledge of Christ we have eternal life.

(4) The sacraments were now invested with a cardinal value. Christian worship had always possessed the two ordinances of Baptism and the Supper, and from the first they had been more than symbolical. Baptism especially, even as practised by John, was supposed to put the seal on an inward change, and in some manner to effect what it signified. But in the Gentile world a new importance was attached to the sacraments. Gentile religion was bound up with sacred rites, which were supposed to carry with them a mysterious efficacy. More than ever in the first century they had become associated with all that was deepest in religious feeling. Since Redemption involved a change of essence there needed to be a miracle by which it was effected, and this could consist in nothing else than in some mysterious rite. It is not difficult to conceive how in this environment a new emphasis was thrown on the Christian ordinances. They now became in the full sense *sacraments.* By means of them men not only signified their desire for the higher life, but believed that in a real fashion they procured it.

(5) It was the Hellenistic influence which brought

into Christianity that attitude of mind which is summed up in the word "mysticism." Many definitions have been offered of this debated and much-abused word; but in all its forms mysticism denotes an effort to commune with God by means which are super-moral and even super-rational. To Jesus himself the mystical idea was foreign. He was not concerned with the being of God, but with His character as a righteous and loving Father. Communion with God was to be realised by doing His will, and so attaining to that moral likeness to Him which makes us His children. But Hellenistic religion was essentially mystical. It rested on the conception of a divine nature from which the soul is derived, from which it has been separated, to which it strives to return. This it can only do by escaping from those conditions of material bondage in which it has somehow become involved. In the first century mysticism had assumed a great variety of forms. There was the philosophical mysticism, which aimed at rising, with the aid of reason, to a sphere beyond reason. There was a nature mysticism, which sought to attain to a mood of ecstasy, chiefly through a rapt contemplation of the stars. Along with these there was a crude, popular mysticism which took many directions and was hardly distinguishable from magic. Thrown into that Hellenistic world, Christianity learned to construe its message mystically. The conception of an ethical fellowship with God was carried to what appeared to be a higher stage. What was now sought for was an actual union with God—a merging of the human soul in the divine being.

The change which took place in Christian ideas may thus be explained from the general atmosphere of religious life and thought in that peculiar time. In recent years the attempt has been made to account for it in a more specific fashion. It was in the first century that the so-called mystery cults were making their way from the Eastern countries into the West. Derived as they all were from a primitive nature worship, they resembled one another closely even in the details of their ritual and legend. They centred on the cult of a divinity, originally the symbol of reviving vegetation, who had died and had been restored to life. Besides their public celebrations they observed "mysteries" to which none but initiates were admitted, after a careful probation. Of the details of these occult celebrations we have no certain knowledge, but so far as we can gather they offered a tableau or rude dramatic presentation of the central episode in the career of the god. The initiate himself was given his part in the drama. He passed suddenly from darkness into blinding light; he handled objects of unspeakable holiness, and listened to awe-inspiring adjurations. The grand aim, apparently, was to induce a trance or rapture in which he identified himself with the experience of the divinity. Becoming one with the god, he passed with him into that higher life into which he had risen. In not a few of their practices and beliefs these Oriental cults seem to have borne a striking likeness to early Christianity, and the view has been widely maintained, in recent years, that the Christian communities, on Pagan soil, became assimilated to the groups which met for the celebration of the mysteries. The historical Jesus took on him the attributes of the Eastern divinities. The Redemption which he had brought was construed, after the manner of the cults, as a dying and rising in mystical union with the Saviour god.

That there was some connection between the cults and Christianity is more than probable, in view of the numerous points of likeness. But the importance of this particular influence has certainly been exaggerated. It is undeniable, for one thing, that the main affinities of the Church were with Judaism. This is taken for granted by all the New Testament writers, and was fully recognised by the heathen world. The cults are mentioned incidentally by Justin, Clement of Alexandria, and several other Fathers, but never with any suspicion that they had been a prime factor in the moulding of Christianity. An influence of which the early Church itself was wholly unconscious can hardly be regarded as a primary one. Again, the Christian mission was carried out independently from many different centres. Each of them had its own type of teaching, its own peculiarities of worship. It may be that in one or another of these centres there were particular circumstances which brought the new religion into close affinity with the cults, but one cannot easily imagine that the same accident happened everywhere. As a matter of fact a specific relation to the cults is barely traceable outside of the Epistles of Paul. His teaching, especially on its more mystical side, is in many respects unique, and never became normative for the Church as a whole. It cannot be inferred from the possible vestiges in his thought of a specific influence that it had a cardinal value for Christianity as a whole. Once more, those resemblances of which so much has often been made are, for the most part, misleading. It is true that in the mystery religions there were customs and beliefs and forms of language which at once suggest those of Christianity, but this was due in great measure to historical accident. No one can deny that these

Pagan religions were products of the same age as Christianity, and every age has its own peculiar usages, its own characteristic terms and ideas. Contemporary schools of thought, which in all essential matters were poles asunder, have always been obliged to express themselves in much the same manner. From this we can infer not that they borrowed from each other or had the same aims and motives, but simply that they belonged to the same age. In still greater measure, the apparent resemblances of Christianity and the cults must be set down to a very common type of fallacy against which the historical inquirer must be constantly on his guard. He is apt unconsciously to read back into the ideas of the past the significance which they have since acquired. Because an institution in Greece or mediæval Italy bore the same name and used the same watchwords as one which now exists, he approaches it with a certain prejudice. He assumes, often in spite of his better judgment, that it had just the same value in that bygone age as it has to-day. One cannot but feel that much of the current discussion of the mystery religions is based on a similar illusion. We know that they employed a number of terms and formulæ which were also taken up by Christianity. With the Christian meaning of these phrases we are well acquainted, and take for granted that they must have had this same meaning for the Pagan worshippers. But a conclusion of this kind is wholly unwarranted. It may be that the term which is associated, in the Christian mind, with a profound spiritual experience was little more to the Pagan than an unintelligible word. In any case, it was connected with a different set of experiences. It had a background of tradition, it was bound up with a complex of religious feeling, which had nothing in common with Christianity. There is need for a protest against the practice, far too common, of taking the language and symbolism of alien religions at their face value. They are tacitly construed in a full Christian sense, and the inference is then drawn that Christianity has added nothing, or has merely borrowed.

It becomes apparent, indeed, the more we study the religious life of the first century, that the relation of Christianity to the mystery religions has commonly been misunderstood. Resemblances there undoubtedly are, but in few instances, perhaps in none, do they point to any direct connection. The truth is that those elements in the cults which do unmistakably reappear in Christianity were by no means peculiar to them. There was no ancient religion which did not allow a prominent place to sacraments, and the most natural and universal of such rites were the sacred meal and the bath of purification. Almost all religions, likewise, have their conceptions of a divine Redeemer ; it springs of its own accord out of man's sense of helplessness in face of the overpowering forces around him. The desire for union with the divine being and the belief that it is attainable by means of ecstasy are also to be met with in numberless forms. There appears, indeed, to be only one conception distinctive of the cults which has its counterpart in Christianity—that of dying and rising with the Saviour god. It is remarkable, however, as has been already noted, that the Christian analogy to this conception is only to be found in Paul. How he arrived at it we cannot tell. Not improbably in his youth at Tarsus he had learned something of the mystery doctrines and fell back on this one, in his effort to explain the purpose of the death of Christ. Whether or not he was clearly conscious of its origin is not a matter of much importance. He saw in the death of Christ the central fact of the gospel, and welcomed suggestions from every quarter which might throw light on its meaning. For this purpose he makes use of Old Testament prediction and imagery, of Roman law, of analogies from nature and common life. He may well have availed himself of the symbolism of the cults, which in this instance afforded him the closest and most illuminating parallel of all. One thing is certain, that the doctrine in question was only a single element in the teaching of Paul. Little trace of it can be discovered in the normal thought of the Church.

It may be said, then, of almost all the characteristics which our religion shared with the mystery cults that they were common property. In that age of Syncretism there was no idea which belonged exclusively to any mode of worship. All the religions were trying to satisfy the same desire for Redemption, and borrowed freely from each other and from the speculation of the age. It has been the error of much modern investigation to treat the Oriental cults as if they existed by themselves, quite apart from the general currents of religious life. On the contrary, they gave typical expression to ideas and sentiments which prevailed everywhere, and which may be traced, more or less distinctly, in the poetry and philosophy of the time as well as in its religion. It was to this, indeed, that they owed their vogue and their place in religious history. To the Western mind they were in many respects foreign. Attempts had been made at various times to suppress them as dangerous and fanatical. But in the first century they had associated themselves with the general movement towards a more earnest religion. They afforded an outlet to that new spiritual life which was stirring in men's hearts. And when we consider the forces which went towards the moulding of early Christianity we are not to think so much of the cults by themselves as of the larger phenomena of which they were a symptom. In that age when all the streams of ancient culture had mingled together, when the East had joined hands with the West, and religion and philosophy were reacting on each other, there had grown up a peculiar set of spiritual conditions. Men had come to envisage their life on earth and their relation to the unseen world in a particular way. It was this total influence of Hellenistic thought which gave a new direction to Christianity. We have to deal with no one definite factor but with a climate or atmosphere which affected the whole life of that time.

As a consequence, therefore, of its entrance into the Gentile world the gospel underwent a transformation. The message of the Kingdom, with its demand for a new will and a new attitude to God, came to be presented as a mystical doctrine. Many would say that by thus conforming itself to the Gentile mode of thought Christianity became practically a new religion. But on a deeper view the change was by no means so radical. It consisted not so much in a fresh departure as in a transposition—an effort to state the original message with a different emphasis. This becomes evident when we think again of the chief modifications which were effected in the Hellenistic version of the gospel.

(1) Jesus had proclaimed a deliverance from the life of sin and misery into that of joyful obedience. He had announced this salvation under the traditional forms of Jewish thought, and in the Gentile world it was conceived differently. Where Jesus had spoken

of rescue from the present age, which was under the dominion of Satan, the Hellenistic teachers dwelt on an escape from the earthly and material—a restoration of the soul to its true life in union with the divine nature. This difference of outlook involved a recasting of the message. Some elements passed out of it and were replaced by others. The ethical teaching of the gospel became subordinated to mystical and metaphysical conceptions. Yet the Jewish longing for redemption was in its essence the same as the Hellenistic, although it had shaped itself under other historical conditions. There was no perversion, not even a misunderstanding of the message of Jesus. The recasting bears witness, rather, to the intensity with which its inner purport was realised. To the Gentiles, as to the original disciples, the message went home with a living power and required to clothe itself in the living forms of thought.

(2) The new conception of his gospel was associated with a new attitude to Jesus himself. He was no longer the Prophet and Teacher, or even the Messiah, but a divinity, who henceforth took the place of the gods many and lords many of the Pagan world. This, at first sight, appears to mark a complete break with the original teaching. When we pass from the Sermon on the Mount to Paul's doctrine of a new life obtained through mystical union with a divine Saviour we feel bewildered. In this later version of the gospel there seems to be little left but the name of Jesus, now transferred to a supernatural being. Yet the roots of Paul's doctrine are plainly discernible in the Synoptic Gospels, and, for that part, in the Sermon on the Mount itself. There also Jesus appears not merely as the prophet of the Kingdom, but as the agent of God through whom the Kingdom will be realised. Along with his teaching

he gives the power whereby the higher life may be obtained. After his death it was this side of his ministry which bulked more and more in the minds of his disciples, and from the first they were seeking for categories which would adequately describe it. Must we hold that their estimate of Jesus as more than a Prophet or Teacher was a mere distortion of the facts? It surely arose, rather, from a clearer perception of the facts. All later reflection on the gospel history has made it apparent that Jesus in his own Person was central to his religion. He was himself the revelation—the power of God and the wisdom of God. It was this truth on which the Hellenistic teachers laid hold, and which they could not but express in their own forms of thought. They conceived of Christ as divine in a metaphysical sense. They interpreted his work in the light of ideas which belonged to mythology rather than to history. Yet in all this they were only translating into a new idiom the essential fact of the gospel. It was no mere imagination that God had revealed Himself in Christ. Men were conscious even in his lifetime that he stood for God, that through him they had access to the sources of a higher life. The modern investigation which has brought us closer to the actual Jesus has not diminished but has enhanced our sense of his unique significance in the life of humanity. He is more of a power in the world to-day than in the age of the great Councils, when the effort was made to define his nature in terms of a metaphysical theology. Such terms, however, were necessary for the Hellenistic mind. By means of them it was able to make real and intelligible to itself the central truth which it discerned in the Christian message.

The Gentile interpretation was no perversion of the gospel; but it could not be carried through without a number of serious modifications. Some of the original elements were lost or obscured. The earthly life of Jesus receded into the background; his ethical teaching was subordinated to doctrinal ideas; increasing value was attached to ritual acts; the Christian attitude to life tended to become morbid and ascetic. With the adoption of the Hellenistic outlook the door was thrown open to Pagan superstitions and to the Pagan exaltation of knowledge as the higher form of faith. Most of these dangers were already perceived by Paul, and as time went on they became always more apparent. For nearly two thousand years Christianity was fixed in a mould which had answered the needs of Hellenistic thought in the first century, but which gradually ceased to have much relation to the realities of faith and life.

Yet it is only fair to recognise that the Hellenistic theology contributed much that was of lasting value. (1) The gospel had now allied itself definitely with the larger spiritual movement. It was based not only on the Law and the Prophets but on all the truth that had been won by Greek and Oriental speculation. The Apologists of the second century were able to claim for their religion that it had brought fulfilment to the world's long search after wisdom. All the light which had lighted every man from the beginning had now been gathered up in Christ. Ever since our religion has preserved this harmony with the general movement of thought. It has been able to use for its enrichment all the growing wealth of culture and science, and this has been one of the main secrets of its vitality.

(2) In some ways the new categories were more adequate to express the purpose of Jesus than those which

he had himself employed. He had proclaimed a message of universal import with the aid of ideas which had grown up out of Jewish history, and which were necessarily cramped and one-sided. There are indications that Jesus was himself aware of the shortcomings of those forms of thought which he was yet constrained to use. He rebelled against the pessimism which underlay the apocalyptic scheme. He accepted the Messianic programme unwillingly and with reserve. Within the first century after his death the Jewish framework in which his message had been given was increasingly felt to be too narrow. The Church was reaching out after new forms which would enable the gospel to unfold the larger meanings which were evidently wrapt up in it. These it found in the Hellenistic conceptions. Humanity as a whole now took the place of Israel. Eternal life could be regarded as a present possession, not merely a hope laid up for the future. Jesus himself was not the Jewish Messiah but the world's Saviour, the Son of God.

(3) A mystical strain now entered Christianity, and has ever since belonged to it, as part of its substance. This, perhaps, has been the most permanent gain which has accrued to our religion from its mingling with Hellenistic thought. It may be true that mysticism in itself is empty of content. All that it imparts is a bare sense of God as the absolute Being who is behind all visible things and with whom we have contact at the centre of our own souls. It can tell us nothing of the nature and will of God ; it can give us no direction as to how we ought to serve Him. None the less, the mystical mood lies at the basis of all religion. All other knowledge of God is rooted in that profound immediate sense that He is, and that our own life is in some way bound up with Him. In the teaching of Jesus there is

nothing directly mystical. From first to last Jesus is concerned with the will of God, and with the fellowship we have with Him by obedience to His will. Yet implicit in the religion of Jesus, as in all other, there is the certainty of that ultimate Being who is the ground and the reality of the world. It was through the Hellenistic influence that Christianity became fully conscious of this hidden motive in its message. Greek speculation, in its fusion with the strange religions of the East, had defined the conception of an eternal Spirit, with whom man's spirit, in moods of ecstasy or contemplation, can hold communion. This conception now entered into the gospel. By fellowship with Christ the believer could realise that he also had the mystical communion with God.

CHAPTER VI

THE CONTRIBUTION OF PAUL

Almost from the beginning the new religion had its face turned towards the Gentile world. Greek-speaking Jews were among its earliest converts, and even in those first days at Jerusalem they seem to have formed the progressive party in the Church. Their free attitude towards the ancient institutions aroused the hostility of the Jewish council. They were driven from the city, while the main body of the Church was left unmolested, and sought refuge beyond the borders of Palestine. In Damascus and Antioch, and perhaps in Rome, they planted communities in which they developed their own type of Christianity. Their mission at first was to their countrymen in the Dispersion, but it soon extended to Gentile proselytes and finally to pure Gentiles. In this manner the gospel made its first approaches to the larger world. The way was prepared for the great man who stands out pre-eminently as the Apostle of the Gentiles.

It is important to remember that Paul did not begin the Gentile mission, as has often been assumed. Before he appeared on the scene it had been inaugurated, and seems to have made considerable progress. All the time that he was carrying on his great work there were other missionaries, hardly less zealous and successful, who were devoting themselves, as he had done, to the conversion of the Gentiles. It may be confidently affirmed that even without Paul the Gentile mission would have gone forward. That Christianity became a universal religion was no historical accident, due to the effort of one extraordinary man. The impulse to the mission lay in the character of the gospel itself. It was a universal message, and was bound in course of time to force its way through all barriers and make its appeal to the world at large. Nor can we hold Paul responsible for the altered form in which the gospel was henceforth proclaimed. It was customary, a generation ago, to speak of him as the second founder, or, as some preferred to call him, the perverter of Christianity. This view has left its mark on much of the popular thinking of the present day. Paul, we are told, took the religion of Jesus, of which he had only a superficial knowledge, and wrested it from its original character—recasting it in moulds of Hellenistic thought which were quite foreign to it. But this process of remodelling, whether it was legitimate or not, had already begun, and was inevitable. It was brought about, not by the singularities of any one thinker, but by the large influences which were at work in the whole life of the time. In the Hellenistic atmosphere the new religion could not but become Hellenised.

Paul, however, although he was by no means the creator of Gentile Christianity, was its outstanding representative. By his personal history and endowment he was peculiarly fitted for the task of mediating between the new conceptions and the Hellenistic mind. He was a Jew, familiar with the traditions of his race, firmly anchored to those principles of Hebrew religion which were also fundamental to Christianity. At the same time he was a Hellenist, born and educated in Tarsus, one of the centres of intellectual life in the ancient world. There is no reason to suppose that he was directly acquainted with Greek philosophical speculation, but his quick sympathetic mind could not be impervious to the influences around him. He would be all the more hospitable to them as his natural bent was towards mysticism. When he became a Christian this mystical temperament was free to assert itself, but it would secretly determine his thinking when he was still in the Rabbinical schools. And while he was thus both Jew and Hellenist, Paul was profoundly Christian. In the modern investigation of the influences which moulded his thought this primary one is often strangely forgotten. With his mobile intelligence, his gift of becoming all things to all men, he laid hold of ideas, in whatever unlikely quarter he might find them, which would help him in the presentation of his message. But the message itself was always his main concern. He was utterly possessed with zeal for the gospel, and was alive, like no other man, to its inward purport. Often he has been regarded as the grand innovator, but in many respects it would be nearer the mark to describe him as the chief conservative force in the early Church. The transformation was bound to come, even though he had never appeared. Not by Paul alone but by hundreds of nameless teachers the work of assimilating the new religion to Gentile thought was being constantly pressed forward. But there was danger that this work might be accomplished in an unwise or a merely reckless spirit. The Church discovered to its cost in the following century how easily the most cherished beliefs could be lost altogether in the effort to express them in new forms, and had it not been for Paul, irreparable harm might have been done at the very outset. It was of priceless value to

Christianity that the man who laboured most earnestly to reinterpret it was also he who had the truest insight into its message. If it was safely carried over into the new world, and mastered the forces which at one time threatened to engulf it, this was mainly the achievement of Paul.

The point is one which can hardly be emphasised too strongly, in view of the misunderstanding to which Paul has always been exposed. There are men to whom history is persistently unjust—whom it seems impossible to judge without some prejudice. Of such men Paul is the most signal example. From the hour of his conversion he was regarded as an interloper who had no right to be in the Christian Church, and this suspicion has hung about him ever since. In his own lifetime the purity of his motives and the validity of his message were called in question, and even in the communities which he himself had founded he had to fight constantly for his position. In modern times the old charges have been urged against him in a different form. We are assured on many sides that what he taught was not Christianity. It was a theosophy of the Hellenistic type, or a Jewish Messianic doctrine in which the Messiah had only a nominal and accidental relation to Jesus. There is still need to assert, as the first essential towards any true understanding of him, that Paul was a Christian. No one can read his Epistles without feeling that the very spring of his religion was an intense loyalty to Christ. "For me to live is Christ." "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." It is absurd to say that the man who wrote such words employed the name of Christ merely as the symbol for certain theological doctrines. There is no mistaking the note of intense personal devotion. Paul is a man overmastered by Christ, inspired by the one motive of spending himself in his service. Behind all his thinking there is the consciousness which never leaves him that he is the Apostle of Christ.

Often it is argued that the object of this devotion was not Jesus, as we know him in the Gospels, but an ideal, imaginary figure—Messiah or divinity—to whom the name of Jesus has been transferred.[1] Such theories make shipwreck on the palpable fact that Paul's loyalty is directed to a Person. The divinities of the cults were confessedly mythical. The apocalyptic Messiah was an abstraction—an agent of divine judgment who possessed no attributes whatever. In such a figure there was nothing for devotion to take hold of. To speak of loving the Messiah, of suffering for the Messiah, would have been a sheer abuse of language. The assertion that when Paul thinks of Jesus he has in his mind an abstract, heavenly being needs, in fact, to be reversed. He speaks of a heavenly being, but thinks all the time of Jesus. He transfers to the glorified Messiah those qualities that have impressed him in the life and character of Jesus. That is the secret of his reverence and devotion. The shadowy figure of apocalyptic has become real; it has become one with Jesus, as men knew him in his earthly life.

In this connection it is necessary to dispose of another common misunderstanding of Paul's attitude. He tells us himself that he had determined not to know Christ after the flesh, and in keeping with this resolve he says nothing of the Galilean ministry, and scarcely makes a reference to the actual sayings of Jesus. It has, therefore, been inferred that he knew and cared nothing about the gospel story. The life, as he regarded it, was only an interval of eclipse, preliminary to the great act in which Jesus asserted himself in his true character. It is certain, however, that there was one event of the life which was always before the mind of Paul. The death of Jesus on the Cross was a part of his life. It was the crowning episode of the life, and gathered into one burning focus all its significance. One can think of great men in history of whom all that we really know is their noble death on behalf of religion or liberty. That is all that we need to know of them. By the one act of their death they revealed the spirit which was in them, and which had never, perhaps, been suspected during the years of ordinary activity that went before. It was indeed a loss to Paul, far greater than he realised, that he did not concern himself more with the life of Jesus after the flesh. Yet assuredly he knew the life. He had pondered over its meaning, as no other man has ever done, in the light of that one manifestation which included everything. When we seek for the inner spring of his boundless loyalty to Christ, we do not need to fall back on any doctrinal or mystical motive. Personal loyalty is always inspired by noble personality, and it was thus that Paul had been drawn to Jesus. "He loved me and gave himself for me." "God commended his love to us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died." In these and similar verses scattered through the Epistles Paul lays his finger on the true secret of the power which the message of the Cross has always exercised. Men have responded with all that was noblest in their own nature to a supremely noble act.

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[1] Wrede's *Paulus* is still the ablest presentation of the Apostle's teaching from this point of view.

There is truth, therefore, in the often repeated assertion that Paul's theology was the outcome of his personal experience ; but this idea is often applied in a loose and unwarranted fashion. We are given to understand that in his whole exposition of the Person and work of Christ Paul is on solid ground. He is no weaver of theories, but only develops, in the form of reasoned doctrine, the data of his actual experience. This is manifestly not so. Such Pauline doctrines as Justification by Faith, the dying and rising with Christ in baptism, the destruction of the Flesh, the new creation through a second Adam, did not spring out of experience. Their origin can be clearly traced in Jewish beliefs and in the religious speculations of the Apostle's time. What he derived from his own experience was simply the knowledge that faith in Christ produces a new life. Since the day of his conversion he had become a different man. He was conscious of a joy and peace and freedom which he had hitherto sought in vain ; he felt himself reconciled with God. This change that had taken place in him was as certain as that he lived and breathed, and he set himself, with the best light he had, to explain it to himself and to others. But in this endeavour he was necessarily thrown back on the categories of his age. His thinking is always sincere and vital, for he is struggling to account for a real experience, and is not "as one that beateth the air." But the experience is one thing and the explanation which he gives to it is quite another, and they must not be confounded.

What, then, are those categories by which Paul tries to account for his experience ? Here it must be remembered that he was at once a Jew and a Hellenist, and that both attitudes of mind were perfectly real to him. We must not think of his use of Hellenistic ideas as a conscious adjustment, such as the modern missionary has to make when he interprets Christianity to Indians or Chinese. Paul had two modes of thought, just as he had two native languages. He had been trained in the religion of the Law and took its presuppositions for granted. He likewise started from those mystical and speculative conceptions which had come to permeate all thinking in the Hellenistic world. Continually he passes from one mode of thought to the other without any feeling of incongruity. Modern analysis can easily distinguish them and prove that they are incompatible. It assumes that Paul also must have perceived the difference, and has tried to show how he sought to reconcile his Judaism with his Hellenism. But no attempts of this kind have been successful. For Paul the two modes of thinking have coalesced. With both sides of his mind together he seeks to interpret the Christian facts. Now he thinks of a redemption from the curse of the Law and now of a redemption from the Flesh, and he sees them involved in one another. Paul, indeed, affords us a concrete illustration of the manner in which Christianity became transformed in the course of the first century. We are not to think of it as thrown deliberately into a new mould, for in all the Gentile missionaries, just as in Paul, there was a double consciousness. Their minds moved at once on Jewish and on Hellenistic lines, and in their presentation of the gospel they used both modes of thought indifferently, with a feeling that they were equally valid. As a consequence the Jewish forms insensibly gave way to the Hellenistic. There was no discarding of the original tradition, and yet, in the course of a generation, it took on a different meaning.

Paul's Hellenism, then, has become so fused with his Judaism that he never thinks of himself as reinterpreting the gospel. Again and again he insists that he is teaching just the same things as the elder Apostles. He can declare, with absolute good faith, that if any man preaches another gospel he is anathema.[1] This may seem strange, but it is even stranger that his claim to have simply handed on what he had received appears to have passed unquestioned. He indeed encountered a fierce opposition, but this, so far as we can see, turned wholly on the practical question of his attitude to the Law. Were Christians to be circumcised? Were they to observe the stated feast-days and the dietary rules? To our minds these appear very trifling matters compared with that reconstruction of the whole Christian belief for which Paul was so largely responsible. We cannot but ask ourselves what Peter must have thought as he listened to Paul's new version of the gospel. Must he not have protested that this Hellenised doctrine was totally different from the message of the Kingdom which he had heard from Jesus? But apparently he never challenged it. He acknowledged Paul as a true missionary of Christ, and only broke with him on a minor matter of religious custom. The Jewish emissaries who set themselves deliberately to undermine Paul's influence, and used every argument they could think of to prove that he was no true Apostle, seem never to have attacked his theology. Here, as we see things now, they had a deadly weapon, ready to their hands. The modern assailants of Paul are satisfied that no other is required to establish the case against him. Yet his enemies in his lifetime seem to have overlooked it; and this fact is extremely significant. It shows us, for one thing, that the Jewish and Hellenistic forms of

[1] Gal i. 8.

thought were interchangeable. No one felt that the meaning of the gospel was seriously affected if you preferred the language of Greek speculation to that of the Messianic tradition. In either case you held to substantially the same beliefs, and you were at liberty to express them in the way you thought best. But we can gather further that the gospel, as understood by the primitive Church, had little to do with theology. The thing that mattered was not your opinions about Christ but the fact that you believed on him and accepted his salvation. Any account of his work which enabled you to do this, sincerely and effectually, was fully legitimate.[1]

The point is one which needs to be clearly apprehended, for it has a vital bearing on the early mission, and above all on the work of Paul. In the course of Christian history religion has become inseparable from doctrine. The great controversies have all turned on the right interpretation of certain religious facts, and we cannot now think of those facts apart from the construction which has been placed upon them. We take for granted that this has always been so. As we look back on the primitive days we imagine the Apostles as anxiously debating the manner in which the Christian beliefs should be understood, so that their converts should not err in matters of such momentous consequence. But in ancient religion generally the idea of orthodoxy hardly had a place. In Judaism, for instance, the one demand was for practical obedience to the Law. Men were free to read their own meaning into the ordinances. The most diverse opinions were held in the various sects, and the Essenes with their half-Persian doctrines, Philo with his allegorising of the Law into a Greek philosophy, were recognised as faithful Jews. The one imperative thing was to perform strictly what the Law commanded. So in Christianity the whole stress was laid on a thing that must be done—in this case to put your faith in Christ. This, as Paul insisted, was the saving act which took the place of works of the Law. Instead of performing the set ordinances a man did this other thing—he believed that Christ was the Lord who had died and risen again.[1] By this act of faith he obtained salvation. Faith, to be sure, involved a multitude of questions which required to be answered, and the effort to answer them began at once, and gave rise to a system of doctrine, ever more complicated. But in its original conception faith was an act valid by itself, whatever ideas might accompany it. The one aim of the missionaries was to produce this act of faith. It mattered little in what fashion men explained to themselves the nature and work of Christ. The essential thing was that by whatever path a man arrived at his faith, he should believe. So long as he possessed a genuine faith in Christ, he shared in the salvation which Christ had secured for his people.

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[1] This rule is explicitly laid down by Paul himself in Phil. i. 15–18.

From this point of view we have to understand the teaching of Paul. His aim is everywhere practical—to awaken in men that faith whereby they will obtain the gift of Christ. We rightly speak of Paul as the first theologian, and discover in his writings the germinal ideas of all later Christian doctrine. Yet he is not primarily a theologian. His interest is not that of the thinker, intent on investigating the truth for its own sake, but that of the preacher or advocate who aims at a practical result. To awaken faith he must not only state his message but explain it, and connect it with all the motives which will act most powerfully on the minds of his hearers. Missionaries before him had urged them to believe. Paul enforces his plea with weighty reasons, and is thus led to inquire into the nature and sanctions and deeper import of the message. Yet his one object, and amidst all the convolutions of his thought he never loses sight of it, is to produce an effectual faith. It is for this reason that his teaching cannot be reduced to logical unity. Many attempts have been made to fit all his doctrines into one another, and so construe a Pauline system, but this effort can never be more than partially successful. Paul is not concerned to build up a coherent system. He presents the great facts of the gospel now from one point of view, now from another, in the manner which will appeal most cogently to the particular audience he has in mind. He avails himself of suggestions from the most various quarters, and substitutes one formula for another when it will better serve his immediate purpose. It is not difficult to show that his ideas are sometimes confused and contradictory But while there is little logical consistency in his teaching, it has the unity which arises from an overmastering religious conviction. He is utterly possessed with faith in the Christian message. He is conscious that it has made him a new man, and will work a like renewal in all who accept it. His manifold lines of argument all converge on the one purpose of communicating his own faith to others.

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[1] The Pauline demand is succinctly stated in the Fourth Gospel: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" (John vi. 29).

At the centre of Paul's religion, therefore, there is the assurance of something which has been done for us by God. By His own act God has bestowed His salvation on men, and their part is simply to accept, by faith, what He has given. They have been conscious from the beginning of a great need, and have sought in various ways to satisfy it, but all their efforts have been in vain. Christianity has revealed God Himself as acting, and it is this which makes it the one all-sufficient religion. It offers us the free gift of God. It brings us the knowledge that what we could never accomplish for ourselves has been done for us. By faith we yield ourselves to this operation of the divine grace.

Here we perceive the significance of that polemic against the Law, which occupies so large a place in the Epistles. From one point of view it belongs to the historical conditions under which Paul worked, and has little interest for us now. He was himself a Jew, and the relation of his new to his old religion was for him of primary importance. The chief opponents of his mission were the Judaists, and he was compelled to meet them on their own ground and answer their criticisms. In itself the controversy with the Law is now as dead as any of the theological debates which are buried in the musty pamphlets of old centuries. But from another point of view Paul's conflict with the Law is of living and permanent interest. Over against the religion of the Law he was able to set forth, in a vivid and concrete manner, what he felt to be the primary characteristic of the gospel. The Law typified for him that mistaken mode of seeking salvation which had been adopted, in one form or another, by all other religions. It rested on the assumption that everything depended on men themselves. The demands of God were prescribed to them in certain definite rules, and they were required by painful effort to earn their own righteousness. In Christianity we become aware of God Himself working for us. This is its distinctive revelation, the nature of which can be most clearly apprehended against the background of the Law. Judaism had pushed to its furthest extent the conception of man's own responsibility, while the gospel declares unreservedly that everything is conditional on the grace of God. The principle of works is replaced by that of faith. Nothing is demanded of man except that he should throw himself with absolute confidence on God, and receive His gift.

This divine gift is summed up in the word "salvation." Paul defines it sometimes in terms of his Jewish thinking, as the deliverance from sin and its penalties. It was the fundamental axiom of Judaism that the righteous God can admit to His favour none but the righteous, and Paul can never free himself wholly from this idea. He feels as a Christian that God forgives men apart from their own deserving, but he is unable to state this truth in its simplicity, as Jesus had done in his Parables of the Prodigal Son and the Pharisee and Publican. Before men can be received by God they must somehow be "declared righteous." Judged by their actual lives they stand condemned, and the Law which professes to help them only holds up an ideal that makes their sinfulness stand out in darker colours. If God is to accept them as righteous, He must Himself "justify" them—crediting them with a righteousness which is not their own. But here, as elsewhere, the Jewish consciousness in Paul is combined with the Hellenistic, and merges in it at every turn. Man is subject to sin, and longs for a deliverance which he cannot himself obtain. Why is he thus helpless in his sins? Because he is a creature of flesh, bound to earthly conditions and therefore separated from God by the very nature of his being. It is true that sometimes Paul appears to think of the flesh as morally indifferent. Like the Old Testament writers he recognises that man is compounded of frail earthly materials, and that sin takes advantage of his weakness. But behind this Hebraic estimate of the flesh there is that other which, as we have seen, was involved in Hellenistic thought. "In me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing."[1] "They that are in the flesh cannot please God."[2] "The Spirit and the flesh are contrary to one another."[3] The flesh is no mere weakness of man's nature, exposing him to the assaults of evil, but is itself the positive source of evil. Paul can speak of the "sinful flesh" as the chief of those hostile powers to which man is in bondage, and from which he longs to be delivered. That we are creatures of earth, unable with all our effort to rise above earthly conditions, is the root of all our misery. We aspire to a higher kind of life in which we shall find joy and freedom, but "we are carnal, sold under sin."[4] How shall we find salvation? "Who will deliver me from this body of death?"[5]

Paul declares, then, that this salvation, which was utterly beyond our reach, has been made possible by a direct act of God. The whole emphasis is thrown on this immediate divine action, with the result that the deliverance is conceived in a sharply objective fashion. Paul puts the Christian message into the framework of a mysterious drama. He describes how man had fallen into bondage. Later thinkers endeavoured to trace back the cause of this primal disaster,[6] but Paul satisfies himself with the fact that even the first man was brought under subjection to sin, and that the whole race henceforth has been at the mercy of evil powers. God, in His eternal love, had from the beginning planned a deliverance, and had ordered the whole course of history with a view to this coming act of mercy. Even the accumulation of sin during the past ages and the ruthless discipline of the Law were designed by God in order to give full effect to the final manifestation of His grace. Then when the time had come He sent to earth His Son, who took on him the conditions of human life that he might do battle on their own ground with man's enemies. He became subject to the Law that he might cancel it ; to sin that it might lose its power ; to the flesh that he might destroy it ; to death that he might abolish death. It will be observed that Paul conceives of these enemies of man in a concrete, almost personal manner. Perhaps he does, in some way, think of personal demonic agents as working through them. More likely the apparent personification is simply due to the strongly objective character of his doctrine. He seeks to affirm beyond all doubt the reality of the work which Christ had accomplished, and so pictures it as a definite conflict with implacable enemies. In order to bring out still more vividly the actuality of the conflict he limits it to the death on the Cross. In that crowning act, to which the life that went before had been only the prelude, Christ gave battle to all the hostile powers. Dying on the Cross, he rendered the satisfaction due to the Law, and destroyed that principle of the flesh which is the cause of sin and death. By his resurrection he completed the victory which had been achieved on the Cross. Rising from the dead, he opened the way into a new life. Men may enter it even now through inward union with him, and this new life on earth will be consummated in an immortal life hereafter. Paul thus describes the Redemption as an objective act, and this mode of presentation has always constituted the chief difficulty in his teaching. It bases the gospel on a sort of mythology ; indeed, there can be little doubt, in view of modern inquiry, that Paul availed himself of various suggestions from the mythologies of his time. Christ is in some measure assimilated to those " Lords " of the Oriental cults who died and were restored to life, and with whom their votaries sought to identify themselves by ecstatic worship. It is hard to say how far Paul intended that all the details of his mystical drama should be taken literally. No doubt he believed that through the enlightenment of the Spirit he had gained access to a "hidden wisdom."[1] He had received an insight, denied to other men, into that secret counsel of God which had manifested itself in the work of Redemption. That his conviction of having died and risen with Christ was intensely real to him cannot be questioned. It seems evident, however, that he did not insist on his own type of belief as the only legitimate one. We know that he worked in harmony with other teachers, that he granted the validity of every exposition of the gospel in which Christ was preached. Perhaps if he had been pressed to say what was absolutely essential in his doctrine he would have answered: " You must believe that God Himself has wrought this redemption. As to His mode of operation you may think differently from me. You may construct your own scheme of the divine purposes according to the light vouchsafed to you by the Spirit. But the Christian faith must rest on the assurance that God Himself has wrought this salvation. It has come about by an immediate divine act. God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself."

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[1] Rom. vii. 18. [2] Rom. viii. 8. [3] Gal. v. 17.

[4] Rom. vii. 14. [5] Rom. vii. 24.

[6] The Gnostics try to solve the problem by an effort of imagination: Origen, followed by the later Church Fathers, rest their solution on an analysis of the will.

Paul has thus dealt with man's need of salvation and the manner in which God has answered it; and the third great theme of his teaching is the response which man must offer in order to obtain God's gift. Nothing is necessary except that it should be received with an open heart, and this attitude is what Paul denotes by the chief watchword of his religion—Faith. This word, as originally used by the Church, meant the act of belief by which Jesus was accepted as Messiah. Paul also employed it with this meaning, but he perceives that belief in Christ is much more than an intellectual assent. It involves a disposition of will, a new attitude towards God. Faith, in the last resort, is the surrender of our will to God—the receptivity by which we avail ourselves of His gift. Behind this conception we can discern a profound psychological truth. All the greatest things—health, happiness, love, wisdom—come to us of their own accord. By anxiously striving to procure them we keep them out. They are not of our making, but are given to us out of the great influences which surround our lives, and our one task is to lay ourselves open to those influences, in entire forgetfulness of ourselves. But Paul's idea of faith is also the necessary correlate to his idea of redemption. God has redeemed us by His own act, and our part, therefore, is to accept what He has done. By surrendering our own will we allow His power to work in us. Paul thus conjoins the idea of Faith with that of the Spirit; the two conceptions are always interchanging in his thought, and are necessary to each other. Faith in itself is passive—the attitude in which we abandon all trust in our own effort and throw ourselves wholly on God. Why is it at the same time an active force, the only one that can renew our lives and make us capable of the greatest things? Paul answers that in response to faith God bestows on us His Spirit. In its origin this conception of the Spirit reaches back into primitive religion, which tried to explain all that was extraordinary in human life by the sudden entrance of an invisible power, mysterious and incalculable like the wind. Old Testament thought had taken up this primitive idea, and had combined it with the belief in God as the one source of power. The Spirit is the Spirit of God, an energy sent forth from Him, which lifts men above themselves and endues them with strength and wisdom and prophetic foresight and the capacity for a holy life. It came upon prophets and great leaders, and would be granted in the fullest measure to the Messiah.[1] In the last days it would be poured out on all God's servants, as hitherto it had only been vouchsafed at rare intervals to His chosen messengers.[2] The primitive Church had seen the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises in the marvellous phenomena which accompanied Christian worship, and in the new capacities which had revealed themselves in ordinary men and women who had embraced the service of Christ. It was reserved for Paul to carry the conception of the Spirit to higher and deeper issues. For him it became the divine power which takes hold of the Christian life, and counteracts the old life of the flesh. It does not come intermittently, but dwells in the believer as an abiding possession. It manifests its presence not merely by strange phenomena but in the normal life of goodness, purity, peace, courage, love. It creates in us that new life of which all these virtues—"the fruits of the Spirit"—are the visible and spontaneous outcome. Thus for Paul the effect of faith is summed up in one word—that it ensures for us the gift of the Spirit. In the act of yielding ourselves to God we open our hearts to that power from above which transforms our nature and accomplishes for us all that had hitherto seemed impossible.

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[1] 1 Cor. ii. 7.

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[1] Isa. xi. 2.

[2] Joel ii. 28, 29.

This, in brief, is Paul's account of the gospel, and it has to be acknowledged that much in his thought belongs to a particular age. Apart from those elements in it which are allied to ancient mythology and which impress us now as arbitrary and fantastic, we are out of sympathy with some of its fundamental assumptions. It rests on the Hellenistic belief that man, as a creature of earth, is in bondage, and seeks deliverance from all the tyrannous powers which oppress him. The achievement of Christ, as Paul understands it, is that he has delivered us. He has overcome man's enemies, and has changed him from an earthly into a spiritual being. In so far as it rests on this metaphysical dualism the teaching of Paul appears to be in conflict with that of Jesus. Where Jesus demands a renewal of the will Paul thinks of a change of nature. He makes the moral process conditional on this mysterious change in the substance of man's being.

It must be repeated, however, that Paul was not solely responsible for the new presentation of the gospel. He only carried out, in a more thoroughgoing fashion, the work which had already begun. As soon as Christianity became a Gentile religion it adapted itself to the Gentile modes of thought. This adaptation was necessary if it was to convey a real and intelligible message to the Hellenistic mind, and so enter on its career as a world-wide religion. It may be added, too, that the new conceptions, while they belonged in their literal form to the thinking of the time, had a permanent value. They served to relate Christian thinking to those larger problems which had come to light in philosophical speculation, and which can never in the end be ignored. It may be true, as we are told by certain modern schools of theology, that religion has been deflected from its right path by concerning itself with matters that have nothing to do with it. Why should it interfere with questions of science, or with surmises about the origin of man and the nature of mind and the creation and destiny of the world? Christ came as the Saviour of men, and the whole business of religion is with moral and spiritual values. But it has always proved impossible to confine the religious interest within one prescribed sphere. The question inevitably arises as to the bearing of our Christian beliefs on the whole world of existence of which we form a part. If the revelation in Christ is to have an absolute worth, it must somehow afford a key to all problems, it must have light to throw on the ultimate purpose of things. Paul, with the aid of his Hellenistic categories, took account of the larger issues. His solutions may seem to us defective, but they have at least provided the starting-point for all subsequent Christian thinking. It is not the fault of Paul if ideas which he threw out tentatively, in order to stimulate others to deeper reflection, have sometimes been accepted as final, and have proved a hindrance to the search after truth. And with all their shortcomings the great conviction that lies at the heart of them is still valid. With the fuller enlightenment that has come to us from knowledge of which Paul never dreamed we can still feel, as he did, that all things are gathered up in Christ. The truth which was revealed once for all in the Christian message is in some way the central meaning of the world.

Our brief survey of Paul's teaching thus brings us back again to the main question: "Did he pervert the gospel? Did he win the world to a Christianity which had little more than a formal relation to the message of Jesus?" One cannot but feel that in the prevailing treatment of this question too much weight has been attached to the details of Paul's thinking. His mind was amazingly fertile, and it is not difficult to examine one or another of his abounding ideas and show how it differs from the gospel as taught by Jesus. But the truth is that with all its apparent complexity Paul's doctrine is fundamentally simple. It is summed up in the great conception that through Christ a divine power entered into the world. By faith we lay hold of this power, which creates in us a new life. Paul expresses this belief by means of an intricate theology, bound up with Jewish and Hellenistic speculations which are often foreign to the original gospel. Yet the belief itself is fully in harmony with the thought of Jesus. May we not say, indeed, that it *is* the vital message of Jesus, and that Paul was the first to realise it, and to place it definitely at the centre of Christianity? Jesus came not merely to teach men certain things about God, but to make the power of God operative in human life. He offered himself as the Messiah through whom the Kingdom would come in. His revelation consisted in the new reality which he gave to all moral ideals, in the quickening he imparted, so that men could henceforth *do* what they could hitherto only desire and dream. With an unerring instinct Paul fastens on this truth and makes it central. He declares that through Christ we have fellowship with God, and receive of the divine Spirit which changes us into new men. To be sure, he expounds this truth in the manner we have seen. He reasons that Christ must have been a being of higher order, who stood in some mysterious relation to God, and had representative value for the human race. By his death he overcame man's enemies, and by his resurrection entered on the higher life which we can share with him through a mystical union. Such ideas had their genesis in the thinking of the age, and the inference is often drawn that Paul owed to it all that was essential in his religion. But the essential thing was surely the truth which he was trying to enforce by means of his borrowed ideas. A redeeming power had manifested itself in Christ. Paul was conscious that it had transformed his own life, and he set himself to declare that it would do the same for all men. His object, it cannot be repeated too often, was to create a living faith, and to this all the rest was subsidiary. "This gospel," he is always insisting, "is the power of God unto salvation. However you may explain it, believe in it, so that it may produce in you newness of life."

Paul was the first and greatest of Christian theologians. He was so individual a thinker, and his thought was so much the product of a peculiar age, that his theology as a whole has never been accepted. In his own time and ever since there have been those who said, "We are of Paul," but they have never followed him beyond a certain point. His influence has consisted, for the most part, in the wealth of separate ideas which he threw out as from an inexhaustible spring. He has been the quickening power behind all later Christian thought. Every theology in the history of the Church has had its germ in some suggestion offered by Paul, and we are still discovering in his writings new and fruitful conceptions which were formerly unsuspected. Yet his chief contribution is not to be sought in the various doctrines which we know as Pauline. He gave it, rather, in his profound conviction that God was in Christ—that a divine power was made accessible to men through the gospel. It was Paul, above all others, who impressed on the world this truth, which, in the last resort, is Christianity.

CHAPTER VII

THE ALEXANDRIAN INFLUENCE

THE process by which Christianity transformed itself into a Gentile religion was at first a casual and almost unconscious one. Men of Hellenistic culture were drawn into the Church, and tried to make their new beliefs more real to them by expressing them under forms of thought with which they were familiar. In this work of reinterpretation they followed no guiding principle. Their one aim was to make use of everything in the intellectual life of the time which seemed to offer some point of attachment to the Christian teaching.

Paul is the outstanding example of this earlier method of restating the gospel. He takes it over in the primitive apocalyptic form and seeks at the same time to Hellenise it, availing himself of suggestions from all the diverse currents of contemporary thought which seemed, at least for the moment, to serve his purpose. His teaching is a mosaic in which ideas of many different types are blended together. While he understands the Christian message in a Hellenistic sense he makes no serious attempt to think it out on these new lines and present it as a consistent whole.

In the teaching of Paul this lack of unity is of little consequence. He has so firm a grasp of the essential truths of the gospel that he can dispense with theological system. He is able from time to time to embody his great conceptions in different forms without ever losing his hold on their inward significance. But there were other teachers to whom his example was dangerous. Without his instinct for what was vital in Christianity they were ready, like him, to employ the foreign ideas. They had no criterion of what might be accepted or rejected, and gave a careless welcome to modes of thought which tended to destroy the whole meaning of Christianity. It needs to be remembered that this was the age of Syncretism. The belief was everywhere prevalent that all religions ought to come together in order to produce out of their combined resources the perfect religion. There was a real danger that in adapting itself to the Gentile world the gospel should lose its identity, and survive merely as an element in a medley of confused beliefs.

What was needed, therefore, if the religion was not to fall to pieces in the process of transformation, was some consistent doctrine which would serve as a framework. In the primitive days Jewish apocalyptic had afforded such a framework. With all its limitations it had enabled Christian teachers to fit their beliefs into one another, and present them coherently and impressively. They thought of Jesus as the destined Messiah, who would return in glory to preside at the Judgment and inaugurate the Kingdom of God. By faith in him men would secure deliverance in the approaching crisis. They could order their lives even now by his precepts, and so anticipate their part in the Kingdom. This was a fully intelligible scheme, but its inadequacy was apparent, almost from the first. It was bound up with Jewish national hopes, which were in themselves fantastic and to the Gentile mind were alien and unmeaning. Not only so, but it failed to satisfy the higher aspirations of Christian faith. There was this defect at its very foundation—that the worth which it assigned to Christ was a secondary and provisional one. As Messiah he was at best an angelic being—exalted, no doubt, above all angels, but divided from God by the whole gulf which separates the created world from the Creator. Faith demanded the assurance that a true fellowship with God should be made possible through Christ; otherwise the salvation which he offered could have no absolute value. The insufficiency of the Messianic idea came clearly to light in the heresy which arose at Colossæ during Paul's lifetime, and which doubtless had its counterparts in other churches. Christ was regarded as only one of a number of angelic Saviours. As Messiah he was felt to represent nothing more than the higher order of spirits, and the inference was a natural one that others of the heavenly company might be worshipped along with him. Such a position, as Paul insists, was subversive of Christian faith.

A stage had therefore been reached when there needed to be some new scheme of thought which would replace the Jewish apocalyptic one, and which would be generally accepted by the Church. It must be such as to affirm, in an unmistakable manner, the central Christian beliefs, and must at the same time be fully congenial to the Hellenistic mind. Christianity, in other words, had now to establish itself on a philosophical basis; and it found the philosophy it was seeking for in Alexandria.

The conditions which had given rise to the Alexandrian system were similar to those which Christianity itself had encountered when it passed over into the Gentile world. For some generations before Christ Jewish settlements had been forming in the great Gentile cities. Wherever they went the Jews carried their religion, and their right to practise it was secured to them by special legislation. No disciples of the Law were more scrupulous and devoted than those of the Dispersion. Yet in the Gentile environment they were affected by the prevailing modes of thought, and this was especially so in Alexandria, which under the Macedonian kings had become the chief seat of literary and philosophical culture. Educated Jews took their full share in the intellectual life of the city. They held to the ancestral beliefs, but sought to interpret them in terms of Greek philosophical thought.

This endeavour seems to have been due to two main motives. (1) On the one hand, the Jews were anxious to vindicate their religion to their Gentile neighbours. To the Greek mind many of the sacred customs seemed barbarous and grotesque, and devout Jews felt it necessary to prove that this estimate was unjust. They maintained that Judaism was a philosophy, in which profound truth was conveyed by means of symbol. The wisdom of the Greek thinkers had been anticipated in the law of Moses, or had even been secretly derived from it. (2) On the other hand, reflecting Jews were under the necessity of explaining their religion to themselves. With all their fidelity to it they had learned to think in the Greek manner. They were unable to accept the ancient forms unless they could somehow reconcile them with their new philosophical outlook. It was in Alexandria that the Scriptures were first translated into the Greek language, and a similar need had brought about the Hellenising of Hebrew thought. The work of the Alexandrian thinkers impresses us, at first sight, as consciously artificial. They seem to force into the Old Testament, by an arbitrary process, ideas which are obviously foreign to it. But to judge them in this manner is to misrepresent them. They are not themselves aware that there is anything illegitimate in their enterprise. They have acquired the Greek mind, and have no other means of understanding their religion than by resolving it into the categories of Greek thought. Even the assumption that Plato borrowed from Moses—to our feeling so palpably absurd—is put forward in quite a serious spirit. It was commonly believed in that age that sacred rites were the vehicle of a revelation imparted in those better days when men stood nearer to the gods. Might it not be that all truth was indeed implicit in the ordinances laid down by Moses, and that the work of Greek philosophy had been to disclose their hidden import? In the strength of this belief thoughtful Jews were now able to take a pride in their religion. At an earlier period, when Judaism first came into contact with the Greek culture, we hear of frequent apostasies, but these were now rare. Jews who were imbued with Greek learning were all the more faithful to their own religion, assured that they could discover in it a yet higher philosophy.

In Alexandria, therefore, Jewish religion entered into alliance with Greek thought. It was a strange union, but the way had been prepared for it by that conception of Wisdom which had been developed in the later Old Testament period. In the Book of Job and some parts of the Book of Proverbs human wisdom is viewed as the counterpart or reflection of a divine wisdom by which the world was made and to whose guidance man must submit his life. When we pass to the early Alexandrian work known as the Wisdom of Solomon, this Hebrew conception is brought into relation with Greek philosophical thinking. The Wisdom which presided over the task of creation becomes the divine intelligence which informs the world, and in which man partakes by virtue of his rational nature. But the grand representative of the Alexandrian movement is Philo (50 B.C.–A.D. 20). His main significance for us now consists in his influence on Christian theology, but in his own right he is worthy to rank not only as one of the greatest of Jewish thinkers but as one of the profoundest minds of antiquity. The form in which his works were cast was unfortunate, and prevented them from ever being widely read. He never expounded his system as a whole or in any orderly fashion, but allowed it to be pieced out, by those who had the necessary patience, from his allegorical commentaries on the early Old Testament narrative. It is not surprising that few references to him can be traced in ancient literature. None the less, he was manifestly one of the creative influences in the later philosophical development. His ideas meet us at every turn in Gnosticism, in the Hermetic writings, in the Neo-Platonists. This influence which Hebrew thought exercised through Philo is too often forgotten. We are apt to think of the Jewish and Hellenistic elements which entered into early Christianity as entirely separate, and in many respects as incompatible with one another. But the Hellenistic movement, as a result of the work of Philo, had itself become partly Hebraised. In its extant literature we come repeatedly on phrases and ideas which have been drawn into a new context but are plainly traceable to the Old Testament. The whole religious attitude of the Hellenistic age was probably affected, to a far greater extent than is commonly supposed, by the Jewish current of thought.

Alexandrian philosophy had been moulded by Greek influence, but it had contributed something in return. It was by no mere accident that ever and again, in the higher thinking of the age, we are strangely reminded of the ethical and religious conceptions of Judaism.

Too little account has been taken by many writers of the Hebrew strain in the teaching of Philo himself. At first sight he leaves the impression of a Platonist or Stoic masquerading in the guise of a commentator on the Law Nothing seems to remain of Old Testament religion except names and phrases which are at once distorted into the symbolical expression of speculative ideas. But on a deeper view we become aware that the underlying motive in Philo's thinking is almost always Jewish. He himself believed that by means of Greek categories he was expounding the inner content of Hebrew religion, and in some degree his claim was justified. Greek philosophy was based on the assumption that Reason is the ultimate truth. God is conceived as the supreme intelligence, and the effort to know Him intellectually is the highest form of religion. The thought of Philo, however, springs from the conviction that there is something higher than knowledge. Reason is nothing but a mode of the divine life ; the rational process is a means by which we ascend to God, but when it has carried us its farthest He is still beyond us. Thus for Philo religion consists essentially not in the exercise of reason but in worship. The conception itself is a genuinely Hebrew one, and the Greek influence is at work only in the manner in which it is interpreted. Worship, as understood in the Old Testament, finds expression in certain ritual acts, while Philo thinks of it as an inward attitude. He assumes that the outward acts are nothing but types and symbols of conditions of the soul, which he sets himself to define and analyse. Thus he has a real purpose when he throws the results of his thinking into detailed commentaries on the ceremonial laws. Between the levitical ritual and the philosophical ideas which are supposed to explain it there seems to be nothing but an imaginary connection. But Philo's procedure, when we look at its deeper motive, is not arbitrary. He starts from the Hebrew conviction that man's highest privilege is "to appear before God." Man is a creature of God, and finds the true satisfaction of his being in the act of worship—in direct communion with the God who made him. Beneath all the crudities of the levitical system there lies this idea, and it attains to clear expression in some of the greatest of the Psalms. "It is good for me to draw near to God."[1] "I will go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy."[2] Philo has an insight into this ultimate motive in Hebrew piety. He fastens on the ritual acts prescribed in the Old Testament, and transforms them, by his peculiar mode of exposition, into impulses of the soul in its yearning after fellowship with God, from whom it is derived. He works with philosophical ideas, but these, in a manner, are no less secondary to his purpose than the literal prescriptions of the Law. His true theme is always the spiritual worship, the fulfilment which is only attainable through union with the divine life.

Philo thus seeks to penetrate into the inner meaning of Judaism, so that he may commend it to the Hellenistic world as the true religion. For this purpose he employs the method of allegory, after the example of

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[1] Ps. lxxiii. 28.

[2] Ps. xliii. 4.

Greek writers who had sought in the same manner to read a deeper significance into the poems of Homer; but with him it is more than a literary device. He is profoundly in sympathy with the Platonic idea that all visible things are only reflections from a higher realm of truth. The world has been made after divine patterns. It is everywhere a symbol or allegory, and through all that it presents to the senses we must try to apprehend those spiritual realities which it shadows forth to us. This is likewise true of Scripture. Under the mask of outward things it imparts the knowledge of mysteries, and these can be discerned through the veil of the letter by the light of the Spirit. Philo believes himself to possess this higher illumination.

In the Old Testament, therefore, he discovers the conception of God as the ultimate Being, who is Himself unknowable although He is the beginning and the end of all existence. How can this transcendent God be related to the finite world? How can man raise himself out of the earthly conditions of his life, and hold communion with God? These are the problems which exercise the thought of Philo, and he finds the solution of them in the Logos doctrine. Stoical philosophy had found the controlling principle of the world in a Logos or all-pervading Reason. For Stoicism this Logos, which was conceived as an ethereal substance, akin to fire but infinitely subtler and more mobile, took the place of God.[1] It was present in man, as in all the world of nature, and man's duty was to bring his own reason into harmony with the universal reason. Philo, however, with his Hebraic sense of the living

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[1] The great Johannine affirmation, "God is Spirit," is found in certain Stoic writings; but it there means that God is nothing but the "Spirit" —the pervading substance which is at once material and rational.

God, cannot accept the Logos as ultimate. It becomes for him the Logos of God—a principle which goes forth from God and shares in the divine nature, but which is yet distinct from God and subordinate to Him. Thus it is intermediary between God and the world. Through the Logos God accomplished His work of creation; through the Logos He reveals Himself to men. In virtue of the reason that is in them men can lay hold of the divine Reason, and their part is to yield themselves to its leading, and so ascend out of the earthly life. The Logos, according to one of Philo's favourite images, is the High-Priest by whose agency man makes his approach to God. Frequently he speaks of the Logos in terms of personality, and it has been suggested that the Stoic conception of an abstract Reason has been modified by the Egyptian doctrine of a secondary deity who was the emanation and self-unfolding of the supreme God.[1] But a theory of this kind is unnecessary. It must always be remembered that Philo's God is not the mere Absolute of Greek philosophy but a personal Being, and the Logos who proceeds from God and shares in His attributes is also invested, in some degree, with His personality. It must be noted, too, that the Logos, as Philo conceives it, is more than the principle of Reason. The Stoic idea is combined with the Old Testament conception of the dynamic Word by which God effects His will. One of the most significant aspects of Philo's teaching is bound up with this active character ascribed to the Logos. He thinks of the attainment of the higher life as not wholly dependent on man's own effort to conform himself to the higher Reason. The Logos cooperates with man. Through this power which goes forth from Him God assists man, and is ever seeking to draw him towards Himself. In some respects Philo anticipates the Pauline doctrine of the grace of God.

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[1] The possible Egyptian background of Philo's doctrine is discussed by Bréhier (*Philon d'Alexandria*).

It was this Alexandrian philosophy which enabled the Church to co-ordinate its teaching and interpret it to the Hellenistic world. The process by which it allied itself with Christian thought cannot be determined. The first steps towards this alliance may have been taken at an early date by converts like Apollos, of whom it is told that he was "an eloquent man from Alexandria, mighty in the Scriptures,"[1] skilled, that is, in the allegorical method. For a long time the new doctrines seem to have been viewed doubtfully. Paul does not employ the Logos theory in his principal letters, although in Colossians, written in his last years, he makes a clear approach to it.[2] In Hebrews the distinctive term "Logos" is carefully avoided. Even in the second century we hear of one sect, the so-called "Alogi," which rejected the Logos doctrine as an heretical innovation. But causes were at work which made its adoption inevitable. (1) The Alexandrian philosophy had been evolved for the express purpose of elucidating the Jewish Scriptures and the Jewish beliefs. Many converts in the Dispersion had doubtless grown accustomed to understand their religion in the light of the philosophical teaching. Just as they read the Old Testament in the Alexandrian translation they explained it by the Alexandrian ideas. (2) The need was increasingly felt among Christians for a coherent doctrinal statement of their beliefs. It was possible in earlier days to throw

[1] Acts xviii. 24.

[2] Col. i. 15–17.

the whole emphasis on simple faith, but the time had now come when questions of the why and wherefore could no longer be excluded. In a world dominated by the Greek spirit all practices and opinions had to place themselves on some rational ground. Roman law was developed with the aid of Stoic doctrine; even the superstitions of astrology were connected with mathematical science and built up into a regular system. Christianity, if it was to satisfy the mind of the age, had to rationalise its teachings—basing them on some consistent theory and relating them to the general scheme of knowledge. (3) Since a philosophy of some kind was required there was none so admirably fitted for the purpose as that which had grown up at Alexandria. The whole problem of Christian faith turned on the question. "Who was Christ? What was his relation to God and man so that he had power to effect redemption?" The Messianic idea had proved inadequate. It had failed to support the conviction that the work of Christ had an absolute value. Some conception of him was needed which would affirm his divine nature, and this was given in the Philonic doctrine of a Logos which was subordinate to God and yet was involved in His very essence. When Christ was once identified with the Logos it was possible to develop all Christian thinking from a central principle which answered the full demand of faith. There were indeed grave difficulties inherent in this theory of the nature of Christ, and ere long they came to light, and gave rise to the controversies which were to shake the Christian world for more than three hundred years. But at the outset they were not perceived. The feeling was one of triumphant confidence that all difficulties had been overcome. Christianity seemed to have possessed itself of the master-key to the whole meaning of its message.

The fatal weakness of the Logos theology, as we see it now, was that it worked solely with metaphysical conceptions. By defining the nature of Christ in terms of essence it entailed an interpretation of the gospel which, in many respects, was radically alien to it. What Jesus had revealed was the love and Fatherhood of God, His goodness, His saving will; and this, in spite of his Hellenistic bent of mind, had been clearly perceived by Paul. But now, under the influence of Logos doctrine, the moral issues were obscured. It was assumed that the real purpose of Christ's coming was to reveal the divine essence and communicate it, so that the substance of man's nature might be changed. We must be careful, however, to allow for the peculiar time and the special need for which the Logos theology was formulated. Hellenistic piety was grounded, as we have seen, in the belief that man's misery is due to his entanglement in earthly conditions. This belief is not to be regarded as a mere figment of philosophical reflection. It answered to that which was most real in the whole religious sentiment of the time, and Christianity had to reckon with it if it was to convey a real message. May we not say, too, that this belief, although it assumed extravagant forms in the first century, had a permanent meaning and value? Religion always involves something which cannot be defined wholly in ethical terms. According to Matthew Arnold's famous definition it is "morality touched with emotion"; but what of that "emotion"? Whence does it arise, and what is its significance? The teaching of Jesus himself is much more than ethical. It has behind it the apocalyptic background, and all that this represents. The fulfilment of the moral law connects itself with the Kingdom of God, and it is this vision of the coming age, the world of higher perfection, which gives intensity and moving power to the demand for righteousness. In all religion there must be a similar background. Moral ideals are inseparable from that longing of the soul to escape from earthly limitations to some higher sphere of freedom. The defect of Hellenistic religion is not that it dwelt on the conception of a divine world over against the visible, but that it made this conception purely metaphysical. For Jesus the idea of the spiritual world had no meaning apart from those moral values which he proclaimed. He taught that in aspiring to truth and goodness a man seeks after the Kingdom and finds it. In no other way than by conforming his will to that of God can he break through the barriers which divide the earthly sphere from the heavenly. Hellenistic religion divorced the moral life from the spiritual. It thought of a transition to the higher world which might be effected through knowledge or mystical rapture and contemplation. This effort to achieve redemption by some other path than the ethical defeated its own end. More and more the whole interest of religion came to be concentrated on external rites.

The Alexandrian philosophy is first employed, in something more than an incidental fashion, by the writer of the so-called Epistle to the Hebrews. This title was prefixed to it at an early date, but is almost certainly a guess, based on the frequent references to the Old Testament and the ancient sacrificial system. Modern criticism is now abandoning the view that the author addressed himself specially to Jewish Christians. He writes in an elaborate literary Greek. He says nothing of the distinction between Jews and Gentiles, which for "Hebrew" believers would have been the vital point at issue. Most significant of all, he shows no appreciation of the real nature of Judaism—laying all the stress on priestly rites, which were now of purely antiquarian interest, while the Law is barely mentioned. It can scarcely be doubted that he writes to Christians as such, at a time when the early racial differences have been forgotten. He bases his argument on the Old Testament because this was the acknowledged Scripture of the Church, and deals with the priestly rites because they are set forth in the Old Testament and may therefore be regarded as conveying, by way of symbol, the divine will. One passage of Scripture is singled out as peculiarly significant—the cryptic verse in the 110th Psalm, "Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek." In the light of this prediction the writer expounds his conception of Christ as the great High-Priest, through whom we have access to God.

The real importance of the Epistle is to be sought not so much in the argument itself as in the ideas which lie behind it. For this writer Christianity is the final and all-sufficient religion, in which all types and shadows have at last given place to realities. To prove that it is thus final he contrasts it with Judaism, the highest of all previous religions, ordained by God Himself to point forward to the great fulfilment. All that was typified in Judaism has now been realised in Christianity. The writer dwells particularly on the institution of the High-Priesthood. This he regards as the very core of the ancient system, for the aim of religion, as he conceives it, is to enable men "to draw near to God." The High-Priest who presided at the great annual act of worship on the Day of Atonement was the mediator between God and man, and it is shown that his work prefigured that of Christ. This ideal High-Priest gathered up in himself all the priestly attributes, and performed his office of Mediator in no mere formal, ceremonial sense but in very deed. One with his brethren, he was yet one with God, "the effulgence of his glory and express image of his Person." As in himself he was the perfect High-Priest, he accomplished the perfect act of priesthood. All other functions of the levitical high-priest converged on his solemn entrance once a year into the Holy of holies, after sacrifice made for the sins of the people. So Jesus offered a sacrifice of inestimable worth, and by right of it entered no material holy place but the sanctuary in heaven, where God dwells in very truth. He entered it to abide there for ever, so that his people might enjoy a lasting, uninterrupted access to God. Although they live on earth, in the midst of its change and illusion, they now belong to the eternal world. This, for the writer of Hebrews, is the meaning of Faith. It is the power by which we throw ourselves into the future and grasp the unseen realities, and we possess it, in the fullest measure, through Christ. He has "passed through the veil" of the material, visible things. By his mediation his people stand in the immediate presence of God.

In this memorable Epistle, therefore, the attempt is made to interpret Christianity in terms of the Alexandrian ideas. Like Philo, the author contrasts the visible world, where all is type and shadow, with the world of eternal reality. Like Philo, too, he builds on the Logos conception. The actual term "Logos" is never employed, but behind all the argument is the thought of Christ as sharing in the nature of God, and as thus qualified to be Mediator between God and man. Once more, as in Alexandrian thought, redemption is conceived as an escape from earthly conditions. The faith which saves is not the Pauline faith, which consists in self-surrender to God, as He is revealed in the Cross of Christ. It is the faith which apprehends the eternal things through the illusions of time and sense. Man, in his earthly life, can make himself a citizen of the heavenly world.

At the same time the writer parts company, in several important respects, with Alexandrian thought. While adopting the Logos doctrine he separates it altogether from the conception of the divine Reason. He thinks of the heavenly world in concrete fashion as the counterpart of this world, and does not resolve it, like Philo, into a system of abstract ideas, existing in the mind of God. Most striking of all is the absence of any suggestion of mysticism. The writer holds firmly to the Hebraic conception of God as "the Majesty in the heavens," the transcendent Ruler of all existence. Man's attitude to God must be one of awe and worship. Through the priesthood of Christ men may draw near to God, but a union with Him, in the Philonic sense, is unthinkable.

This rejection of some of the essential elements of Philo's thinking may be partly due to the writer's temperament, which was reflective and imaginative rather than mystical. It may also be due, in some measure, to his antecedents. Although a Hellenist he shows a curious affinity with primitive Christian belief. In all probability he belonged to the Roman Church, which had received the gospel not through the agency of Paul but directly from Jerusalem, and continued to maintain it in its earlier form. But the chief reason for his difference from Philo is doubtless that his work is still tentative. The new mode of thinking had not yet acclimatised itself in Christianity; the changes which it involved in the whole religious outlook were not fully perceived. The writer of Hebrews holds out a hand of welcome to Alexandrian thought. He sees in it an instrument whereby the Christian teaching may be unfolded in its larger and deeper significance. But as yet he can only suggest, in experimental fashion, how it may be employed.

It is this which gives a unique interest to the Epistle. We can trace in it the beginnings of the process by which the Hellenistic ideas were deliberately applied to the fuller understanding of the gospel. Hitherto the process had been an unconscious one. Paul himself is confident that his teaching in no way differs from that of the original Apostles, although he illustrates and enforces it by contemporary ideas. The writer of Hebrews, however, is fully aware that he is using new categories, and admits that much in his discourse will appear novel and difficult.[1] Not only does he offer, for the first time, a doctrine which goes far beyond "the rudiments of the teaching of Christ,"[2] but he is conscious that his whole method of approach is new. Instead of allowing each Christian belief to stand by itself he aims at relating all beliefs to one central conception which will unify and explain them. It must be acknowledged that in the working out of this plan he is only half successful. The traditional framework of the gospel is still so generally accepted that he has no choice but to adhere to it. His theory of the higher invisible world is combined with the apocalyptic doctrine of the new age; the Old Testament ideas of worship, sacrifice, priesthood, are never completely merged in their Greek philosophical equivalents. It must be admitted, too, that in this Epistle we can clearly discern the weakness of the Alexandrian system as an organ for the interpretation of Christian thought. With all its religious possibilities it was designed to satisfy an intellectual need. By means of his Logos doctrine Philo was intent on proving how the absolute God could enter into relation with the world of change and time, how man, in spite of his earthly limitations, could attain to true knowledge. These were not the questions which Jesus had set himself to answer. When attention was concentrated on them, when the right solution of them was made the vital issue in Christianity, much of its real meaning fell out of sight. This became fully apparent in the later Greek theology, and already in Hebrews we can see an impoverishment of Christian ideas. The ethical demands tend to be overlooked. Faith is no longer the act of self-surrender to God, but a sort of intellectual faculty, whereby we realise the unseen. Access to God ceases to involve that inward harmony with His will which makes us His children.

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[1] Heb. v. 11.

[2] Heb. vi. 1.

Yet it would be wrong to say that the Christian teaching has in any sense been overlooked or distorted. The view is sometimes put forward that Christianity in Hebrews has become merely a phase of Alexandrianism,[1] but the very opposite is true. More remarkable than anything else in the Epistle is the manner in which the philosophical ideas are Christianised. Christ is the Logos; but this conception entirely loses the abstract character which it has in Philo. The writer thinks of Jesus as he had actually lived. His earthly life, so far from being obscured, becomes the very means whereby he is fitted for his supreme task of mediation. Instead of displacing the gospel history the Logos doctrine is made to illuminate and enhance it. We are made to realise that all religion has found its goal in Christ, that God has laid hold of men through his life and death, that he has provided for us "a new and living way" and brought us "a better hope by which we draw nigh to God." The Epistle is written, indeed, for the very purpose of asserting the paramount claim of Christ and his message. Addressing a group of readers who were in danger of "drifting away,"[1] the author seeks to impress on them the supreme value of their religion. It offers the one salvation, the one means of approach to God. It constitutes the "new covenant," built on better promises; and only those who share in it are God's people. The Epistle from beginning to end has no other purpose than to express this lofty consciousness of the worth of Christianity. The writer believes that its inner purpose will be best understood in the light of Alexandrian ideas; but his interest is not in the philosophy but in the religion, and in those elements of it which are most distinctively Christian. In his main object he succeeds. There are many things in his argument which belong to a bygone mode of thought, but the greatness of the Christian religion has never been more nobly and impressively set forth than in this Epistle. For all later times Christ has been what he was to this unknown writer—the great High-Priest, who became in all points one with his brethren, that he might pass within the veil and be their Mediator with God.

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[1] This view is suggested by Windisch ("Introduction to the Epistle to Hebrews," in the *Handbuch zum N.T.*).

The Epistle to the Hebrews marks the beginning of the process by which the Christian message was reinterpreted in terms of the Alexandrian philosophy. In the Fourth Gospel this process is brought to its completion. The evangelist no longer feels it necessary to keep the Logos doctrine in the background. His Gospel opens with a Prologue in which the Alexandrian basis of his thought is explicitly stated. Christ was no other than the Logos, who had been with God from the beginning ; this, we are given to understand, is the key to the story which is to follow. It is true that in the body of the Gospel the term " Logos " does not recur, and the inference has been drawn that the Prologue is of the nature of an afterthought, with no intrinsic bearing on the history. But this criticism misses the all-important point that the Gospel deals not with the Logos but with the Logos made flesh. Christ in his earthly life was no longer the abstract divine principle but a human personality, and to denote him by the metaphysical term would misrepresent his nature. We have here to do with no mere verbal distinction but with a fact that is cardinal to the understanding of the Gospel. The view has often been advanced that the evangelist set himself to revise the Christian message in the interests of the Logos theory. He goes back, we are told, to the actual history, and changes it deliberately into an allegory of the manifestation of the Logos. But his aim, there can be little doubt, is just the reverse of this. He seeks to establish the reality of the life, as against those who would allow it a merely symbolical value. In the great opening statement, " The Word was made Flesh," both clauses are significant, but the emphasis must be thrown on the second. This is a certain inference from the First Epistle of John, which proceeds undoubtedly from the same school of thought as the Gospel, and in all probability from the same author. Admittedly the Epistle is written to refute the Docetic heresy, which denied that Christ had come in the flesh. A similar interest underlies the Gospel. One of its chief purposes, if not its primary one, is to declare that Jesus, although the Son of God, was truly man. He was not the Word only, but the Word made flesh.

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[1] Heb. ii. 1.

At the time when the Gospel was written there was an imminent danger that Christianity should be severed from its historical origins. The primitive beliefs were now understood by most thinking men in the light of Hellenistic speculation. There were teachers of high standing in the Church who were inclined to read the gospel history as a sacred myth which had little value except as the basis of theosophical doctrines. The Fourth Evangelist was confronted with this type of teaching. He himself shared the Hellenistic outlook, and never doubted that the purpose of Christ was to impart knowledge, divine life, redemption from earthly bondage. Yet he profoundly realised the worth of the historical revelation. He perceived that the message was empty, even from the Hellenistic point of view, unless the life of Jesus had been lived under actual human conditions. Otherwise there could be no assurance that the divine nature had ceased to be remote, and could now ally itself with the life of humanity. The grand mistake of most of the modern interpreters of the Fourth Gospel has been to contrast it with the Synoptic records. When it is so regarded it seems undoubtedly to portray an ideal, theological figure, rather than an actual man. But the true contrast is not with our three Gospels but with those mythological versions of the life which underlie the Gnostic systems. Over against these strange inventions the evangelist insists on the historical facts. To us, with the Synoptic narratives before us, he may seem to idealise the facts beyond recognition, but in his own view he was placing them on a sure basis. The chief aim which he kept before him was to vindicate the faith, apart from which there could be no Christianity, that Jesus had manifested God in a true human life. His attitude may fairly be compared with that of Christians to-day, who accept the scientific view of the world and the results of modern thinking, and yet hold firmly to their belief in Christ. They are confident that it will mean more to them the more they can bring it into the fullest light of the new knowledge. The Fourth Evangelist was abreast of his own time. He was in sympathy with those modes of thought which then represented man's best and sincerest effort to know the truth. None the less, he takes his stand on the historical revelation. He believes that the new ideas, which for many had made faith impossible, will serve to illuminate what had been given once for all in the recorded life of Christ.[1]

How far can his narrative be accepted as genuine history ? This question opens a great problem which cannot here be discussed, but it may be said that the extreme views, held by many radical critics of the last century, are now being generally abandoned. It is admitted that at some points John has preserved a better tradition than the Synoptists. There are grounds for believing that he may have been in possession of some early document, and that the desire to enlarge and elaborate it may have been one of his motives for undertaking his work. In recent years the theory that our present Gospel is a composite writing, built around some primitive nucleus, has been widely entertained, and many attempts have been made to distinguish the various strata.[1] These are all doomed to failure, for whatever records the author may have possessed he has thoroughly recast, and on the whole work he has put the stamp of his own peculiar thinking. In any case the special material which he incorporates must have been scanty. It can be demonstrated that his main sources are our own Synoptic Gospels, which he follows in the general order of his narrative, in his selection of incidents, and in numerous points of detail.[2] Broadly speaking, his aim is to recount their story in his own way, so as to bring out its inward significance.

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[1] The author of 1 John insists that the "new commandment" is no other than "the old commandment which ye had from the beginning" (1 John ii. 7).

In this endeavour, then, to affirm the Christian facts, while allowing full weight to the later interpretation, he calls to his aid the Alexandrian teaching. The heretical doctrines to which he opposes himself were dangerous for two reasons. On the one hand, they were based on no consistent view of the Christian message. Any speculation which happened for the moment to be attractive was given ready entrance, with the result that the Gospel was gradually being overlaid by foreign accretions which had little relation to it or to one another. On the other hand, in these new versions of Christianity no adequate place was assigned to Christ himself. He was indeed clothed with lofty attributes, borrowed from many mythologies. His name was ascribed to one of the central agents in the great cosmical drama. But the total effect of all this speculation was to empty him of all reality. He became more and more a mere name and abstraction. The idea of redemption ceased to be related, in any vital way, to him and his work. The Fourth Evangelist finds in Alexandrian thought a solid basis on which to build up a coherent scheme of Christian doctrine. At the same time it supplies him with a conception which enables him to assert, in a manner there can be no mistaking, the value of the revelation in Christ. As the Logos he had come forth from God and had taken on him man's nature that he might impart to man the divine life.

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[1] Cf. the reconstructions by Wendt, Spitta, Wellhausen, Loisy, etc.

[2] His dependence on Mark and Luke seems quite apparent. Whether he was acquainted with Matthew is more doubtful.

So in the Fourth Gospel the apocalyptic ideas which are still retained in the Epistle to Hebrews are boldly exchanged for others, derived from the Alexandrian system. The Kingdom of God becomes "eternal life"; the Judgment is conceived as always in process, and depends on the attitude of men towards the Light;[1] the resurrection consists in the inward renewal which is effected here and now.[2] The whole purport of the Christian message is construed in a Hellenistic sense. Christ, for the evangelist, is the Life-giver, who makes possible for his people that new birth, that essential change of nature, which is the necessary condition of true life. As he is the Life, so he is also the Light; and here also the idea is Hellenistic. The Greek conception of knowledge, as we have seen, had in the later age been employed in a mystical interest. Knowledge is being. That which a man knows becomes, in the most real sense, an element in his own life. It therefore follows that to know God is to share in the nature of God; and this higher knowledge can only come by immediate vision. Christ gave this revelation of God, and being the Light he was also the Life. To see him is to see the Father and thereby to participate in the divine essence.

[1] John iii. 19 ff.

[2] John xi. 25, 26, v. 24.

The problem for the evangelist is to connect the Logos conception of Christ with the historical record. How can Jesus be regarded as at once a human Person, who had lived and died in Palestine at a particular time, and as an invisible, abiding presence, with whom men may everywhere hold inward fellowship? Paul had tried to solve the problem by refusing to know Christ after the flesh, and directing his faith wholly to the risen Lord. Teachers who followed him in the Gentile mission had gone further, and had declared that the life on earth had been only an illusion, by which a being of heavenly nature had made himself perceptible to human sense. Against this error the Fourth Evangelist makes his protest. He sees clearly that with the denial of reality in the life of Jesus the gospel itself loses all reality. At the same time he recognises that the heretical teachers were trying to express a great truth. If Jesus was the revelation of God, he must have been more than an historical Person who was gradually fading into a distant memory. The life as it had once been must in some manner have continued with men, so that in all succeeding times they should have a direct access to the Saviour. How could both the attitudes to Christ be reconciled? How could he be conceived as at once an actual Person in history and a universal and abiding presence? The evangelist answers this question by the new interpretation which he gives to the hope of the Parousia. Nothing had so perplexed the Church as the failure of the early expectation that Jesus would shortly return to bring in the Kingdom. It was this, more than anything else, which awakened doubts, in some minds, of the whole Christian message.[1] But the evangelist maintains that the hope had not failed. Jesus had returned, as he had promised. The death on the Cross had been the act by which the eternal Word had thrown off all earthly limitations. He had vanished from men's sight in order to come back invisibly to his people and abide with them for ever.[1] The life on earth was only the earnest and the beginning of a larger, unchanging life. It is this twofold view of the life of Christ which gives peculiar character to the Fourth Gospel, and in some measure justifies the estimate of it as more allegory than history. For the evangelist, however, the history and the allegory are bound up together. He thinks of Jesus as at once the earthly Master and the invisible Lord with whom we can still hold fellowship. Both conceptions are equally real to him, and he seeks to blend them into a single picture. He presents Jesus as he lived on earth, but intends that all his words and actions should have a reference beyond their immediate one. We are to realise that as he once dwelt with his disciples he dwells with us still, in the experience of faith. He departed that he might come again, and from our knowledge of his earthly life we learn to discern him in his inward and eternal presence.

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[1] Cf. 2 Pet. iii. 4

In order to bring out this larger significance in the life of Christ the evangelist makes use of the Alexandrian ideas; and it has often been contended that by so doing he has radically changed the whole character of the message. We are told that he surrendered completely to the Hellenistic influence. He allowed it to shape his conception even of the historical facts, so that he could not think of Jesus in his life on earth except in the light of mystical theological doctrines. This, however, is to misunderstand or rather to invert his purpose. If he views the life theologically, we must at least acknowledge that his theology is all concerned with the life. The outstanding fact about his Gospel is that it *is* a Gospel—not an abstract speculation but an attempt to discover what was given to men in the historical life of Jesus. In other words, the evangelist is not primarily interested in the Hellenistic theories, but in the distinctive message of Christianity. He makes use of the theories only because he is convinced that by means of them he will better understand the message. They have light to throw on something which is itself independent of them. Jesus had appeared with a new revelation. Who was this Jesus? What was the ultimate meaning of his work for the world?

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[1] John xiv. 19, xvi. 16 ff,

It may be granted that the philosophical categories are not wholly adapted to the purpose for which they are used. If proof were needed of their inadequacy, we have it in the very fact that the evangelist is so often compelled to do violence to the historical tradition. At every turn he finds it necessary to modify the recorded incidents. Sometimes he has to omit them altogether, or to replace them by others which have at most a slender basis in the actual story. A haze of unreality is thrown over the narrative as a whole by the constant effort to force it into keeping with a doctrinal theory. In the Fourth Gospel, more than in any other New Testament writing, we are made conscious of the difference between Christian and Hellenistic thought. The salvation offered by Jesus was something other than a deliverance from the earthly bondage, and he could not be defined in Hellenistic terms without a serious confusion of the issues. Nevertheless, the evangelist has succeeded in the purpose which he set himself. His Gospel, with all its shortcomings, is no distortion of the Christian teaching. With the aid of the borrowed ideas he brings to light, as no one had done before him, the truth which had always been inherent in the message itself.

(1) He perceives, in the first place, the real meaning of the work of Christ. "I came that they might have life, and have it more abundantly."[1] It is true that this gift of life is conceived in the Hellenistic fashion as a divine essence which enters into human nature and transmutes it into something higher. This certainly was not the thought of Jesus. Yet the evangelist expresses, in the manner most real to the Hellenistic mind, the truth which Jesus himself had sought to convey in his message of the Kingdom. He had proclaimed the better time when the will of God would be done on earth. He had called on men to follow him, that through him they might have part in this coming fulfilment. The apocalyptic forms which he employed were those of his own time and country, and every succeeding age has construed his message under new forms, widely differing from each other. But however it may be defined, there can be no doubt as to the fundamental conception. In the hearts of all men there is the aspiration towards some higher good in which they will realise the end of their being. What is the nature of this fulfilment? Our evangelist calls it Life, and this account of it has approved itself to all time since as more true and comprehensive than any other. The ultimate longing is for no definite and partial good, but for more life; and Christ came as the Life-giver. What he imparted was nothing else than a divine power, through which men are born again into the new life.

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[1] John x. 10

(2) Again, while he clothes them in a new form, the evangelist is faithful to those ideas of God and of man's relation to Him, which underlie the teaching of Jesus. It is often said that he simply takes over the Philonic conception of the absolute, unknowable Being, the One who communicates Himself to the many, through the Logos who proceeds from Him. In a formal sense this may be true. All the teaching of the Gospel is necessarily affected by those Alexandrian doctrines from which it sets out. But even for Philo, as we have seen, God is much more than the Absolute of Greek philosophy. Into all his speculation Philo carries with him his Hebrew consciousness, and never forgets that while God is the One behind the many He is also the sovereign Personality who governs all things in righteousness. The evangelist, too, takes this belief for granted, and goes far beyond it. In the First Epistle of John we find the magnificent statement, "God is love"—the simplest and grandest of all theological creeds. It would not be difficult to show that this same conception of God pervades the Fourth Gospel. The language of the Prologue is not to be explained wholly from Greek or Alexandrian thought, although a parallel to every phrase has been discovered in the philosophical literature.[1] Before he has borrowed the alien ideas the evangelist has Christianised them. He thinks of the eternal, self-existent God as the God revealed by Jesus—the God who loved the world and whose very being is one with His love. In like manner, the relation of man to God is conceived in terms of moral personality. The evangelist indeed makes use of Hellenistic categories from which the moral element

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[1] The parallels have been carefully collected by Grill (*Untersuchungen über die Entstehung des 4ten Evangeliums*. pp. 99 ff.).

seems to be wholly absent. He describes man as a creature of flesh—excluded from the true life until a miracle is wrought in him and he is born of the Spirit. But behind all this there is the conviction that we have fellowship with God by moral obedience. Love to God is manifested by doing His commandments; knowledge of God consists in submission to His will; to serve the brethren, to love one another, is the substance of the Christian life. No one can read the Supper discourses without feeling how entirely the philosophical mood has been merged in the purely religious one. It is no doubt present all through these chapters. In the promises of Jesus to return to his disciples, and the prayer which he offers on their behalf, we can detect the influence of Philonic ideas. But the only effect of their presence is to add a mystical tinge to thoughts which are essentially Christian. The one interest of the evangelist is in his Christian message. Whatever he borrows from the speculation of the time is only a vehicle by which he seeks to impart it more fully and impressively.

(3) Once more, the whole inspiration of the Gospel is Christian. It is a strange perversity to regard the evangelist as an Alexandrian thinker, who employs the Christian beliefs only as a cloak for his philosophical doctrine. He is utterly possessed by his Christian faith. He is convinced that through Christ he has received a revelation of God and the power of a new life. In order to express this sense of the significance of Christ he avails himself of the metaphysical ideas, but at best they are secondary for him. Again and again, when they clash with his Christian belief, he breaks away from them, careless of the apparent inconsistency. He sets out to interpret the life of Christ in the light of

Alexandrian doctrine, but as he proceeds with his task the conception of the Logos becomes little more than a halo around the figure of Jesus as he had actually been—the great Friend and Teacher who had lived for God, and who loved his own unto the end. The Gospel is written, as the author himself declares, "that believing in Christ ye may find life through his name."[1] This, when all is said, is its one motive. There is indeed no better measure of what was given by Christianity out of itself than the contrast of this Gospel with the Hellenistic literature which it appears superficially to resemble. Passages may be culled from Philo and kindred writers which appear, at first sight, to reflect a mode of thought which was much the same as that of the Fourth Gospel. Yet the writings of these men are only the relics of an old-world philosophy. The Gospel, for two thousand years, has been a fountain of life. No one can deny that it owed much to contemporary thought, and especially to the great philosophical movement which proceeded from Alexandria. Its debt on this side is possibly greater than has yet been suspected. Yet the debt was at most an external one. From the alien sources it only derived the forms in which its message was expressed. We must look elsewhere if we would explain the secret of its power.

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[1] John xx. 31.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CONFLICT WITH HERESY

TOWARDS the end of the first century the Church began to change its attitude towards the foreign influences. It had hitherto recognised that, if it was to win the Gentiles, it must employ the modes of thought which were most congenial to them. Suggestions from the philosophy of the time were eagerly welcomed. Christian practices and beliefs were assimilated to those of Hellenistic religion. It was never doubted that this hospitality to the current ideas was legitimate and helpful. The missionaries were confident in their possession of the guiding Spirit, and allowed themselves a complete freedom. In their seeking after "knowledge" they rejected nothing that might bring more clearly to light the deeper implications of the gospel.

Even before Paul's death, as we know from his closing Epistles, this attitude had begun to change, and from this time onward the Church became increasingly critical of the foreign ideas. In the later books of the New Testament we have constant reference to "false teachings." Practically all these writings are in one way or another controversial. Responsible teachers have grown aware that dangerous forces have found entrance into the Church and must be counteracted if the true interests of Christianity are to be preserved.

This change of front has sometimes been regarded as a tardy confession that the Hellenistic influence, which had seemed at first to strengthen the Christian faith, had all the time been inimical. Paul, in his eagerness to commend the gospel to the Gentiles, had called in the aid of a foreign power who now refused to go, and who was making himself master of the country. In the course of a desperate struggle which continued through the whole of the following century, the Church succeeded in saving part of its inheritance. By such violent measures as the imposition of creeds and the enforcing of a strict organisation it compelled its members to adhere, at least externally, to the traditional beliefs. But the main position had been already lost. Christianity at the outset of its career had cut itself off from its origins and had become definitely Hellenistic.

The facts, however, may be explained in a different manner, and we shall find reason to conclude that this other explanation is the right one. Christianity had never been subdued by the alien forces. It had pressed them into its service and made use of them, but always with a clear consciousness of its own intrinsic message. As soon as they threatened to submerge the message it had firmly resisted them. In other words, the opposition to heresy in the later New Testament period is the best measure we have of the strength of the original gospel. The Church was called on to decide what was and what was not Christian and with a sure insight it made its decision. Ever and again in subsequent Christian history there has been a similar crisis. The Church has opened its doors freely to influences from without, and a point is reached when they threaten to prove subversive. But at this point there has always come the reaction. It is made evident that the religion has never lost the sense of its own identity, and has only borrowed what it can assimilate and use. The Church has often been accused of saving itself from time to time by yielding to new forces which are likely to prove too strong for it; and in this criticism there may be a measure of truth. But the other fact has also to be borne in mind. The yielding is never more than partial, and is followed invariably, as in the first century, by the rebound. What has saved the Church in all times has not been compromise with the prevailing ideas but the permanent strength of the principles of the gospel. They have never failed in the end to control the influences which seemed for the moment to have overcome them.

Towards the end of the first century, then, we begin to hear of "false teachings" which were endangering the faith of the Church. Later controversialists had various theories as to how this heretical movement arose. They associate it with individual figures—Simon Magus, Cerinthus, Menander—but do not tell us how these men became perverted. We are given to understand that they went astray through intellectual pride, personal ambition, seduction by Satan. Modern inquiry would explain the origin of the movement in a different way. It was not due to individuals, though no doubt it found its representatives in outstanding men, whose names may have been correctly preserved in the later tradition. Neither was it due to any spirit of mere perverseness. There is no reason to doubt that the "false teachers" were sincere men, who prized their Christian faith, and were confident that they were enlarging and deepening it. The true origin of the movement must be sought in the conditions which inevitably accompanied the Gentile mission. When Paul wrote his First Epistle to the Corinthians there had been no time for the appearance of anything that could properly be called "false teaching." The Church at Corinth had only been three or four years in existence, and knew nothing of the gospel except what it had learned from Paul himself and his fellow-Apostles. Yet already in this typically Hellenistic Church a number of abuses had sprung up which Paul finds it necessary to combat. They had not been imported from any particular quarter, but were native to the soil; they doubtless manifested themselves in greater or less degree in all the Gentile Churches, just as they did at Corinth. From Paul's criticism of them we can gather pretty clearly what they were, and the mere catalogue is highly instructive. The Apostle rebukes his Corinthian converts (1) for their overweening confidence in "knowledge";[1] (2) for the perverted ethic which treated the bodily life as spiritually indifferent;[2] (3) for contempt of the "weak brother";[3] (4) for a view of immortality which excluded the idea of resurrection—that is, of personal identity after death;[4] (5) for the excessive value placed on those ecstatic gifts which were ascribed to the immediate action of the Spirit;[5] (6) for a confusion of the Christian faith with the visible rites, especially that of baptism, in which it found expression.[6] Paul does ample justice to the zeal and sincerity of the Corinthian Church, but it is not difficult to gather, from the shadows in his picture, what had taken place. The new message had excited a keen intellectual interest in the Hellenistic mind. It seemed to offer a profound wisdom which was to be explored and elucidated with the aid of philosophical ideas, while the moral demands were made secondary. At the same time it appealed to that sense of mystery which was such an essential element in ancient religion. By faith in Christ the believer possessed himself of a wonder-working power: he had part in strange observances which brought him into mystical fellowship with the divine nature. It was these characteristics in the new religion which chiefly impressed the Gentile converts, and Paul had sympathy with their attitude. He was himself a Hellenist, and to him also Christianity was a higher knowledge and a new spiritual life. But with his instinct for the central things in the gospel he recognised the moral values as supreme. He saw in Christ the revelation of divine love; he thought of peace, long-suffering, goodness as the true works of the Spirit. Knowledge and the mysterious gifts, as he regarded them, were means to an end. For the ordinary Hellenistic mind they were the end itself.

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[1] 1 Cor. viii. 1–3.
[2] 1 Cor. vi. 13.
[3] 1 Cor. viii. 10 ff.
[4] 1 Cor. xv. 12 ff.
[5] 1 Cor. xii.–xiv.
[6] 1 Cor. i. 14–17.

So from Paul's experience at Corinth we learn something of that religious temper which ensured a welcome to the false teachings. It must further be remembered that this was the age of Syncretism. The idea had taken deep root that all religions were aiming at the same thing, and that they grew in value the more they borrowed from each other. It was not uncommon for a man of exceptional piety to attach himself to a number of different cults, believing that in this way he would enlarge his spiritual vision and make his position absolutely secure. Among the Christians there were doubtless those who still preserved their connection, openly or secretly, with heathen organisations. Paul is perhaps thinking of such instances when he speaks of members of the Church who are seen eating meat in the idol's temple.[1] Even when the convert had broken wholly with all forms of Paganism he inevitably brought over with him much that was non-Christian. In his previous religion he had aimed at certain spiritual benefits and had in some degree obtained them. He sought to procure the same benefits now in Christianity, and had no wish to discard the means he had hitherto found helpful. Not unnaturally he felt that if he combined them with his new manner of worship he would only make it the more effectual.

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[1] 1 Cor. viii. 10.

It was the exclusive attitude of Christianity which constituted the chief hindrance to its progress in the Gentile world. The conditions were in many ways highly favourable to the work of the missionaries. In a degree to which it would be difficult to find a parallel the age was one of tolerance. With the absorption of all races into the one empire the old national cults had broken down, and the field was now thrown open. It was recognised everywhere that all types of religion were legitimate, and wherever the Christian teachers appeared they were granted a fair hearing, and were able to found churches which were left unmolested. This tolerance, moreover, did not arise from mere indifference to the claims of religion. Men were earnestly seeking for spiritual light. They were intensely conscious of a burden and a bondage from which they could find deliverance only by higher aid. In the success of countless impostors and of all kinds of crazy superstitions we have pathetic evidence of that craving for religious light which was universal in the age. There are abundant signs, too, that men were alive to the unique value of the Christian message. Too often it has been represented as attracting only the poor and ignorant, while the more intelligent were disposed to ridicule it as a foolish delusion. No doubt its adherents were chiefly among the poor. These, as in all times, formed the vast majority of the people, and they were drawn in a peculiar manner to a religion which laid such stress on human brotherhood, and which offered to its poorer converts so many priceless advantages. But from the outset it made its appeal to men of culture and reflection. Paul speaks of those, and they doubtless existed in every church, to whom he was able to teach his higher "wisdom."[1] His letters are themselves evidence that even the ordinary members of the Church were thinking men and women, to whom he could open his mind freely on the greatest themes. The old idea that Christianity at first made little impression needs to be laid aside. It manifestly made a deep impression. Thoughtful men, when once they had become acquainted with the gospel, could not but see that it contained elements of the highest worth, which they would gladly have adopted into an eclectic system, and to which they were willing to accord a central place. In this manner we must explain how Gnosticism, in the course of the second century, came to be mainly associated with Christianity. At the beginning it was purely Pagan, and grew out of the effort to construct a speculative religion on the basis of Syncretism. Yet, as time went on, the Gnostic systems increasingly took on a Christian character. While they continued to borrow the greater part of their fantastic symbolism from the various Oriental mythologies they identified the heavenly Redeemer, on whom their teaching turned, with Jesus. However this came about, it was a tribute to the impression created by Christianity. Men had learned to acknowledge that of all existing religions it was the richest and most suggestive. In their effort to think out a comprehensive religious system they were constrained to adopt it as a foundation.

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[1] 1 Cor. ii. 6.

So the chief difficulty of the early missionaries was not to secure acceptance for their message, but to vindicate its exclusive claim. They required of each convert that he should give up his previous religion for Christianity, and were constantly met by the rejoinder, "Why should I not keep both?" Given the conditions of the time this was reasonable. If the aim of Christianity was that which all religions were obscurely following, how could it lose by adopting helpful elements from its rivals? It was all the harder for Paul and his fellow-missionaries to answer this question as they themselves shared in the Hellenistic outlook. They recognised that the current beliefs and philosophies had much to offer, and were anxious to secure for the gospel all that was valuable in this contribution. Where was the line to be drawn? How far could Christianity absorb the foreign elements and yet remain true to its own character? In his First Epistle to the Corinthians we see Paul grappling, more or less consciously, with this problem. He lays down two criteria by which all ideas that seek entrance into the new religion must be tested: that Christ must be made absolutely supreme, and that all other interests must be subordinated to that of love. These, however, were tests which were only capable of a vague application, and Paul himself is anxious that the gospel should not be defined in too narrow a sense. "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit."[1] This criterion, as he himself understood it, was a sufficient one. He thought of the gift of the Spirit as involving a passionate faith in Christ, and an ethical temper which manifested itself in love. Yet this identification of true discipleship with the gift of the Spirit carried with it a grave danger. Pagan religion, no less than Christianity, was enthusiastic in its nature, and beliefs entirely contrary to those of Paul were often expressed with all those rapturous accompaniments which he was wont to ascribe to inspiration of the Spirit.[1] Indeed, in the next generation those whom the Church described as "false teachers" claimed for themselves, in an emphatic sense, the title of "spiritual men." It seems to have been largely because of the value set upon them in heretical circles that the spiritual gifts fell latterly into disesteem.

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[1] 1 Cor. xii. 3.

Thus from the very beginning the conditions which favoured the progress of the gospel made also for its perversion. The Hellenistic world, eager for all higher light, gave a welcome to the new message, but would not hear of its pretension to have all truth in itself. Other religions all availed themselves of what their rivals had to offer; why should it be otherwise with this one? It had scarcely found a footing in the cities of Greece and Asia Minor when new ideas and beliefs were pressed on it from many sides, with the purpose of enriching it. Paul did not discourage this tendency, although he perceived its danger. He commends the Corinthians for their zeal for "knowledge," and is content to warn them that it must be governed by the spirit of love. He is confident that by impressing on his converts the true nature of the gospel he will be able to hold in check those influences which might possibly become mischievous. For the time being his confidence was justified; but when the authority of teachers like himself, who were firmly grounded in the Christian principles, was withdrawn, the disruptive forces threatened to gain the upper hand. Zeal for "knowledge" began to take the form of "false teaching." We know too little of those early heresies to assign them to their definite origins, but they apparently fell into two classes. (1) There were teachings, on the one hand, which had a genuine relation to Christianity. They had begun with converts who, like Paul himself, were of Hellenistic birth, and apprehended the gospel in the Hellenistic manner. Only they went further than Paul in their adoption of alien ideas, and lacked his instinct for what was truly Christian. Intent on broadening the message, they introduced into it confusing elements which tended to subvert it. (2) On the other hand, we may distinguish types of heretical teaching which were radically Pagan. Simon Magus, who appears in the Book of Acts, may have been a half-legendary figure, but he was representative of not a few teachers of the time—Pagans who had been attracted by the new religion and sought to graft it on some syncretistic form of belief. These Pagan versions of Christianity competed with Christianity itself, and won numerous converts from the Church. All that was valuable in the gospel seemed to be included in the new teaching, along with other elements which it lacked. We are to think of our religion during this later period as in a state of flux. In the following age the wilder theories were condemned, and were relegated to dubious sects which were excluded from the Church. But as yet there was no clear means of deciding what had the right to call itself Christian. Beyond the limits of traditional belief there was a wide borderland which seemed to fall within Paganism but might yet be reclaimed for Christianity. What was to be done with that doubtful type of opinion? It was not definitely rejected, but was allowed to maintain its place as "erroneous teaching" in the Church itself.

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[1] This was acutely pointed out by Celsus in the middle of the second century.

A number of phases of the heretical movement come before us in the later New Testament writings. (1) We meet with it first as a recognised danger in Paul's Epistle to the Colossians. There has been much dispute as to the precise nature of the teaching which is assailed in this Epistle. Its character, so far as it can be gathered from Paul's allusions, was at once Jewish and Hellenistic, and none of the known heresies presents this double aspect. Most probably it conformed to no specific type. Its chief significance lay just in this—that it blended in a quite arbitrary manner a number of elements which had little congruity with the gospel or with one another. As a given form of teaching it may have been confined to one particular district, but it illustrates the confusion of ideas which was everywhere prevalent. Occult rites were taken over from Pagan cults, while at the same time the Jewish holy days were rigorously observed, and the dietary rules were pushed to the point of asceticism. A prominent feature of the Colossian heresy was the "worship of angels,"[1] a practice in which Jewish angelology may have mingled with Pagan theories of the emanation of intermediate beings from the absolute God. Paul, in his criticism of the heresy, lays stress on two features of it which stamp it, to his mind, as radically un-Christian. On the one hand, it made Christ only one of many divine beings, who likewise shared in the work of Redemption. On the other hand, it identified the service of God with mere ritual ordinances, of little or no value in a religion which had its centre in faith alone. (2) We have already had occasion to consider the type of error which is refuted in the First Epistle of John, and presumably in the Fourth Gospel. Docetism—the belief that the divine nature was incapable of any contact with matter, and that Jesus only *seemed* to possess a human body—was a well-known variety of early Christian speculation. It commended itself especially to men of philosophical mind who wished to ground their faith on something beyond the historical facts. Others might take the life of Jesus literally; for them it resolved itself into a sort of parable of the manifestation of the divine nature. We can well understand, therefore, that docetic opinions were frequently allied with intellectual arrogance. Those who had attained to what seemed to be the profounder view were contemptuous of ordinary believers, who still accepted the tradition in the more obvious sense. They placed an exaggerated value on knowledge, and neglected the paramount demands of Christian love. In this manner, as John reminds them in the Epistle, they missed the deeper knowledge to which they aspired.

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[1] Col. ii. 18.

In other New Testament writings of the later period the controversy with false teachings is likewise prominent. (1) The author of the Pastoral Epistles recommends a stricter supervision over the churches in view of the strange doctrines which were perverting the faith. There were teachers who denied the resurrection,[1] who restricted salvation to a favoured class,[2] who introduced " myths and endless genealogies " (corresponding, apparently, to the æonic systems of later Gnosticism) into the Christian history.[3] They identified morality with an ascetic discipline which prohibited marriage and the use of particular foods.[4] Against these false conceptions of the gospel the writer insists on loyalty to the Apostolic teaching, based as it is on the "words of the Lord Jesus Christ,"[1] and the Old Testament Scriptures.[2]

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[1] 2 Tim. ii. 18.

[2] Tit. ii. 11; 1 Tim. ii. 1–4.

[3] 1 Tim. i. 4.

[4] 1 Tim. iv. 1–4.

(2) The letters to the Seven Churches in the Book of Revelation are mainly directed against the heresies, which were making rapid headway in Asia Minor. Several of the erroneous sects are expressly mentioned, but the nature of their teaching is only indicated in vague terms. We can gather that they made much of their adherence to Jewish tradition, and at the same time indulged in libertine practices—on the ground, no doubt, that the spiritual and material spheres were entirely separate. The writer quotes one striking phrase which they seem to have used as a sort of watchword, "to know the depths of Satan."[3] It points, perhaps, to some wild doctrine that the truly spiritual man must explore the secrets of evil as well as of good. Or perhaps the writer is hinting ironically that the knowledge of mysteries on which these heretics prided themselves was of the devil and not of God.

(3) The Epistle to Hebrews contains only a passing reference to "divers strange teachings."[4] The movement which the author had particularly in mind was one which placed a religious value on the use of certain articles of food. Perhaps he alludes to some attempt to reimpose on Christians the dietary rules of Judaism. But his language seems rather to suggest practices which were new and peculiar. The asceticism which had its origin in the Hellenistic estimate of matter was beginning to find entrance into Christian piety.

(4) The companion Epistles of Jude and 2 Peter appear to be the latest of the New Testament writings, and are more violent than any others in their polemic

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[1] 1 Tim. vi. 3, v. 18.

[2] 1 Tim. v. 18; 2 Tim. iii. 16.

[3] Rev. ii. 24.

[4] Heb. xiii. 9, 10.

against the false teachers. With these Epistles we feel ourselves already in the region of the great controversy which broke out towards the close of the second century. Little is said about the specific doctrines of the heretics. All the stress is laid on their consequences in pride, selfishness, covetousness, outrageous immorality. The incidental allusions to doctrine make it practically certain that the heresy attacked is some form of Gnosticism—less developed than that of the later schools, but of the same unmistakable type. Its adherents understand the Scriptures in a sense of their own ;[1] delight in pompous, mysterious language ;[2] distinguish between the supreme God and the Creator.[3] They lay claim to a "liberty,"[4] a "spiritual" nature, which were denied to common believers. They interpret Christian ideas in a fanciful, allegorical sense,[5] and hold a doctrine of Christ which cancels all that was most essential in his work.[6]

There can, indeed, be little doubt that the false teachings assailed in the New Testament were nothing but the early advances towards what was afterwards known as Gnosticism. Even in the later time the Gnostic heresy never became a coherent system. It belonged to the very essence of the movement that boundless liberty was granted to speculation, and as a consequence every teacher put forward his own construction, which his disciples in their turn modified at their pleasure. In the earlier period the characteristics of the heretical beliefs were even less defined.

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[1] 2 Pet. i. 20.

[2] 2 Pet. ii. 18 ; Jude xvi.

[3] 2 Pet. i. 3, iii. 5.

[4] 2 Pet. ii. 19.

[5] 2 Pet. iii. 4.

[6] 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.

The great Gnostic masters of the second century had at least succeeded in establishing certain ideas which henceforth controlled the new mode of thinking. Most notably they drew a sharp line between the Jewish and the Christian revelations, assigning all the laws laid down in the Old Testament to an inferior God, from whose tyranny men had been delivered by Christ. The New Testament heresies betray nothing of this anti-Jewish sentiment. Speculations derived from Gentile thought are blended with practices which seem due to a Jewish conservatism, such as Paul had combated. For this reason many scholars have doubted whether there was any relation between the earlier heresies and the later; but the attempts to trace back the Colossian and similar errors to some obscure Jewish source, such as the doctrine of the Essenes, are unnecessary. We are still in the time when the effort to enrich Christian thought by foreign contributions is tentative and uncertain. Suggestions are taken over from Gentile philosophy and mysticism; others are welcomed just as eagerly from the side of Judaism, which, in view of its close relation to Christianity, seemed to have a superior claim. Too much has often been made of the details of the "false teachings" which come before us in the New Testament. These, for the most part, are arbitrary. Every one of the teachers had probably his own method of dealing with the accepted beliefs, and his selection of new elements was more or less a matter of accident. The one thing common to all the divisive sects was the effort to change Christianity into a syncretistic religion. The heretics called themselves Christians; they sincerely believed that the Redeemer had appeared in Christ. Yet they perceived that in other religions of the time there were elements of value.

Why should not these be combined with the Christian beliefs ? Might it not be possible to arrive at a composite religion which should blend in itself all the scattered lights of revelation ?

The attempt was in itself a legitimate one, fully in keeping with the principles of Christianity. Paul had recognised that the new religion was one of liberty. It did not consist in hard-and-fast dogmas, but in certain great aspirations and beliefs which could be expressed in many ways, all of them true and significant. In accordance with this view of it he had borrowed freely from all the varied thought of his time. He felt that nothing was alien to Christianity which helped to throw light on its inherent message and enhance its power of appeal. It was on this principle, likewise, that the Gnostics went about their task. We judge them commonly—as we inevitably judge the leaders of defeated causes—from the point of view which established itself through their failure. A creed was formulated with the express purpose of ruling out all the positions for which they had stood,[1] and their teaching, appraised by this standard, is a perversion of the truth. The very motive that prompted it is ruled out as presumptuous. But to do them justice we must throw ourselves back into the time when Christian thought was entirely free. It was still possible to regard Christianity as a newly discovered country which was waiting to be explored. All ideas might fairly be pressed into service which helped towards the understanding of this final revelation.

Not only were the heretics engaged on the same task as Paul and his fellow-Apostles, but to all appearance they were performing it in the same way. The aim of the early missionaries was to commend the gospel to the Gentiles, and in pursuit of this aim they replaced the categories of Jewish with those of Hellenistic thought. They presented Jesus not merely as Messiah but as a divine being through whom men could escape from material bondage and partake in the divine life. The heretical teachers might fairly argue that they were only completing the process of reconciling the new message with contemporary thought. Paul and the others had said little of its bearing on cosmical problems. They had not explained the difference between the spiritual and the earthly man. They had spoken of a higher "knowledge," but had little light to throw on the mysteries with which it was concerned. The Gnostic teachers set themselves to make up these deficiencies in the earlier gospel. They assigned the Redeemer his due place in an elaborate cosmology. They traced the difference between natural and spiritual men to its ultimate cause in events in the heavenly world. They examined the nature and origin of evil, so that the redemption from it might become more intelligible. With the help of ancient mythologies and philosophical speculations they sought to penetrate the secrets which eye hath not seen nor ear heard. No doubt in all this endeavour they lost their way in wild fantasies which had little to do with the Christian teaching or for that matter with common sense; but the endeavour itself was justified. It sprang from the fuller exercise of that Gnosis which Paul himself had taught men to seek after as one of the highest gifts of the Spirit.[1]

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[1] Denial of the Gnostic beliefs is demonstrably one of the chief motives of the so-called " Apostles' Creed "—on which all the later creeds are modelled.

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[1] 1 Cor. ii. 10 ff.

The New Testament writers are themselves conscious that in large measure they occupy the same ground with the heretics. It is this, more than anything else, which makes much of their polemic hesitating and unsatisfactory. Already in 1 Corinthians Paul saw the danger of attaching an undue importance to "knowledge"; but in the very act of warning against it he declares that he himself imparted "a wisdom to those who are instructed." Its nature, as he goes on to describe it, appears to have differed little from that of the heretical wisdom. It was concerned with the hidden plan of God, and the manner in which Christ, by his death, had turned the malice of the Satanic powers against themselves. When he tries to distinguish this wisdom of his own from that of the other teachers, Paul can only say that theirs has come by human speculation, while he is taught by the Spirit of God. The main object of the Fourth Gospel, as we have seen, was to counter the errors of some early form of Gnosticism; yet the evangelist finds himself compelled to grant not a few of the most important Gnostic positions. He makes perfect knowledge one with eternal life; he describes Christ as sharing in the metaphysical attributes of God; he thinks of men as belonging by nature to the two classes of sons of darkness and sons of light. From a very early date there were those in the Church who doubted whether the gospel itself was not a production of the Gnostic schools.[1] So in the First Epistle of John the argument involves itself again and again in contradictions. We are told that "he who is of God cannot sin," and also that "he who says he has no sin is a liar."

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[1] The *Alogi* maintained that it was the work of the heretic Cerinthus. The theory of its Gnostic origin has been revived in recent years by Kreyenbühl (*Das Evangelium der Wahrheit*), who assigns it to Menander.

The witness of the Spirit is made the one test of truth, and yet the heretics are rebuked for their confidence in this witness. The whole emphasis is thrown on Christian conduct, while at the same time the author's vital religion is one of mystical communion with God. It might be shown that all through the New Testament there runs a similar vein of inconsistency. The heretical contentions are never really answered because, on the premises accepted by all Christians, they could not be. All that the false teachers were doing was to develop, in their own manner, certain recognised beliefs. Their opponents could only say, "You have gone too far"; "You have given a wrong application to this truth or that"; "Your belief, though the same as ours, has been obtained in an illegitimate way." It is the fate of all controversy that to a later age it appears a fighting about shadows. The disputants, sharing in the opinions of their time, are unconsciously in agreement; and their differences, to themselves so important, are hardly discernible in the larger perspective. This also has befallen the New Testament controversialists in so far as they attempt a positive refutation of the heretical beliefs. The distinctions which they magnify appear to us imaginary. As we see the issues now they hold common ground with their opponents.

The real force of their polemic is not to be sought in the arguments which they definitely put forward. It consists, rather, in their recognition of what was left out by the heretical account of Christianity. For instance, the writers of Jude and the Pastoral Epistles denounce the "cunningly devised fables," the "great swelling words of vanity," which were characteristic of the Gnostic systems. These strictures, no doubt, are fully merited; yet it must be confessed that the Gnostic speculations are not, intrinsically, more fanciful and arbitrary than Paul's esoteric "wisdom." Philosophically considered, they were of much higher value. Basilides and Valentinus, not to speak of lesser men who preceded or followed them, were gifted thinkers who offered, in imaginative form, a notable solution of the eternal cosmical problems. We need not wonder at the fascination which Gnosticism exercised in its day, or ascribe it wholly to a morbid craving for the bizarre and unintelligible. To the Hellenistic mind, which regarded "knowledge" as one of the essential elements in religion, the Gnostic ideas gave a real satisfaction. What the Church objected to was not the extravagances of Gnosticism but its neglect of principles which plainly belonged to the very substance of Christianity. It was profoundly felt that unless these were maintained the religion was meaningless. Hellenistic thought had much to contribute. All Christian teachers were glad to make use of it, and were willing to accept its presuppositions. But it was perceived that this great instrument for disclosing the hidden purpose of the gospel would be worse than futile unless the Christian motives were made primary. We cannot do justice, therefore, to the New Testament polemic when we regard it merely as an attempt to answer the heretical positions. These, it may be shown, are left practically untouched. Consciously or not, it is admitted that the new religion must be interpreted with the aid of conceptions derived from current speculation. But the New Testament writers are resolved that the speculation should be kept subordinate to the vital Christian interests. The significance of their polemic is to be found in this firm assertion of what is distinctively Christian.

(1) It is insisted, in the first place, that Christ must

be accepted as the one Lord, who sums up in himself all the redemptive forces. The heretics ostensibly allowed him a supreme rank, but made his appearance only a moment in a vast cosmical history. They associated him with a whole hierarchy of angelic powers who likewise played their part in the divine plan. This, it was perceived, was to break down Christianity at the centre. Its entire meaning consists in this—that it finds in Christ the all-sufficient revelation. When he is made one among a number of Saviours, as in ancient Syncretism and modern religions of humanity, we have something which is no longer Christian. All the Christian values may seem to be retained, but they have lost their sanction, and with it their meaning and power.

(2) Again, the New Testament insists on the reality of the life of Christ. For all Gnostic thought he tended to become a mere symbol of abstract divine forces. In the earlier docetism this conception of him was reflected in the crude theory that his earthly appearance had been that of a mere phantasm. The later Gnosticism identified him with a heavenly principle—one of the higher æons of the Pleroma—which had associated itself for a time with a human life. The underlying motive was always the same, and has since reappeared under many disguises—that of detaching the Christian revelation from its historical setting, and thus securing for it a permanent validity. The New Testament writers perceive that this endeavour defeats its own end. It may fairly be argued, according to the well-known dictum of Lessing, that facts of history are in their nature contingent, and can provide no ground for an absolute truth. But it is also certain that an ideal does not properly exist while it remains a mere abstraction. The Word must become flesh. The power from

above must somehow enter into the life of humanity before men can respond to it and submit themselves to its influence. It is clearly recognised in the New Testament that when the gospel is separated from its historical basis it is emptied of meaning. The message which it proclaims and which makes it a redeeming force is nothing else than this, that the divine life has become actual. "That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled, declare we unto you, that ye may have fellowship with us."[1] Without this sense of a higher principle which became real in the life of Jesus there can be no Christianity.

(3) In their controversy with the "false teachers" the New Testament writers never fail to lay stress on the ethical purport of the message. Their attacks on the moral shortcomings of their adversaries were probably, for the most part, unwarranted. In all ages the readiest way of disposing of hostile opinions has been to denounce those who hold them as bad men. It may be surmised that the sweeping accusations in Jude and 2 Peter and the Book of Revelation are in great measure rhetorical, like similar outbursts in the polemical works of Luther or Milton. Yet in their strictures on the moral consequences of the "false teaching" the New Testament writers undoubtedly lay a finger on its chief weakness. It divorced the idea of spirituality from that of conduct. It dealt wholly with Christianity as a higher "knowledge," and had little to say of its ethical demands. The New Testament teachers themselves shared the Hellenistic belief that the evil of human life arose from its earthly quality, and that Christ had come to effect a "birth from above." None the less, they saw clearly

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[1] 1 John i. 1.

that the new life meant nothing apart from moral obedience. To partake in the divine nature meant, in the last resort, to be possessed with that will of God which makes for love and righteousness. The heretics, by their neglect of the ethical requirements of Jesus, were striking at the very roots of his religion.

(4) It is recognised, more specifically, that the heretical teaching destroys the principle of Christian brotherhood. In their claim to represent a higher, more spiritual type of Christianity the heretics had separated themselves from the Church and worshipped in little coteries by themselves. They contracted a mood of aloofness and spiritual pride which was manifestly opposed to the whole tenor of Christ's teaching. It is mainly on this ground that the author of the First Epistle of John bases his argument. He believes, like his opponents, that the spiritual man is essentially different from others; but, in spite of all theological assumptions, he sees the one evidence of the higher nature in Christian love. "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"[1] In a religion that has its outcome in arrogance, in a temper that drives a man to stand apart from his less enlightened brethren, there must be something fundamentally amiss. What it is, the writer of the Epistle cannot say, since he himself accepts the prevailing view of the higher life as grounded in an inborn affinity with God. Nevertheless, he holds to the conviction that the vital thing in Christianity is the spirit of love. The religion that sets it at naught, or makes it secondary, cannot be Christian in anything but name.

The great period of conflict with Gnosticism did not begin until after the New Testament had closed ; but the issue was really decided in that preliminary battle of which we have made a brief survey. It must be admitted, for that part, that the Fathers who continued the controversy in the second and third centuries had no clear conception of the larger questions involved. They took for granted that the struggle turned entirely on matters of doctrine, and criticised the Gnostic systems on the score of their logical inconsistency, their disagreement with Scripture, their obvious dependence on Pagan sources. Over against the heresies they formulated what they regarded as the correct rule of faith, and this henceforth became binding on the Church. But the interest at stake in the conflict was not primarily one of orthodox doctrine. One can conceive of a theology which might have been built up on Gnostic foundations and would still have been Christian. This, indeed, was in some degree what actually happened. The great theologians, from Irenæus onward, who developed the Catholic doctrine, were far more indebted to Gnosticism than they knew. It mattered comparatively little, and has never greatly mattered, in what intellectual forms the Christian ideas were embodied. The essential thing has always been that the ideas themselves should be Christian. Whatever the forms which are borrowed from the thought of a particular time, they must not be allowed to overshadow and stifle the vital truths of which they are made the vehicle. It was the New Testament teachers who ensured that at all costs the genuine interests of Christianity should be maintained. They perceived that in its ultimate nature the gospel was not a system of belief but a call to faith and love and righteousness—a power that created a new life. They insisted that in any new construction a place must be given to those elements of the religion which are peculiarly Christian—loyalty to Christ, obedience to his law, love of the brethren.

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[1] 1 John iv. 20.

In one sense the teachers of the Church and the "false teachers" were engaged in the same task, and there is no reason to doubt that they pursued it with equal sincerity. They were striving to express the new message in terms that would make it real to the Hellenistic world as it had been to the first disciples. For this purpose they availed themselves of all the resources of contemporary thought. They developed a method of "knowledge" by which they sought to understand the gospel in its larger and deeper implications. But the heretical teachers in their pursuit of this knowledge lost sight of the truth which they had set out to illuminate. They subordinated the simple Christian beliefs to speculative ideas; they regarded the gospel history as nothing but the channel for the conveyance of a higher philosophy. The result of their work, therefore, was to merge the new religion in the general system of Hellenistic thought, while the New Testament teachers demanded that the gospel itself should be made central. While they welcomed all the contribution from without, they used it as a means for establishing and unfolding what had been given through Christ. This, broadly speaking, was the point at issue in the early controversy. Was Christianity to lose itself in the stream of Hellenistic speculation? Or was the Hellenistic movement to be subjugated and transformed by Christianity?

At the same time, it is difficult to do justice to those heretics of the first two centuries. We know their teaching only through the reports of their adversaries, who were careful to give prominence to those aspects of it which were most repugnant to Christian feeling and sober reason. The Gnostic ideas, as we now possess them, are torn from their context, and would doubtless be much less absurd if we had before us the whole scheme of thought in which they were inwoven. It must always be remembered, too, that the heretics presented their teaching under symbolic forms which have now become unintelligible. Those æonologies and cosmologies which are detailed for us by the Church Fathers are apt to leave on us no other impression than that of a disordered dream. How rational beings could ever have found meaning in such inventions, much less how they could have extracted from them a satisfying religion, we cannot now comprehend. Yet we know that much of the most earnest Christian life in those centuries was in the Gnostic camp. We know that the heresies were only overcome after a long and doubtful struggle, and that, in spite of their ultimate defeat, they contributed much that proved of lasting value. In several ways they brought to light real elements of Christian truth, which the Church itself was in danger of neglecting.

(1) For one thing, they stood for the conviction that a supernatural power was at work in Christianity. To be sure, this conception of the gospel as a new revelation embodied itself in strange fancies. Wild mythologies were devised to explain the descent of the Redeemer into the visible sphere. The Christian message was represented as an occult knowledge, imparted by Jesus after his Resurrection, and reserved for the chosen few who possessed the spiritual nature. Strangest of all was the sharp antagonism to the Old Testament, as containing the law of an inferior, tyrannical God. It was assumed that the work of Christ consisted in the manifestation of the true God, who had hitherto been

hidden from men, and whose sovereignty had been usurped by the God of creation, who had imposed His yoke through the Law and the Prophets. We can now realise that the severance of Christianity from its antecedents in Hebrew religion would have meant an incalculable loss. Yet it is not difficult to see that the protest of the Gnostic thinkers was necessary. Paul had only half succeeded in his effort to establish the truth that the gospel was a new revelation. For ordinary Christians, and in no small measure for Paul himself, its meaning was confused by the settled belief that it must somehow be correlated with Jewish tradition. The perplexity is one which has beset the Church in all ages as a consequence of the effort to maintain the Old Testament alongside of the New. The contrast between the old and the new morality, between the God of Hebrew history and the God of Jesus, has created a real dilemma, which has only been partially solved by the modern conception of a religious development. The Gnostics adopted the bold course of discarding the Old Testament altogether, and insisting on the absolute newness of the Christian revelation. To this Gnostic belief that Christianity was a wholly new religion, which must possess a sacred book of its own, we are mainly indebted for the formation of our New Testament. Apart, however, from this memorable outcome, the belief marked a great and necessary advance. Before the gospel could be rightly understood its newness had to be placed in the strongest possible light. Justice might be done later to those anticipations of its teaching which could be found in Judaism and other forms of faith, but it had first to be presented in its distinctive character as a new revelation. It may, indeed, be granted that in their effort to assert the newness of

Christianity the Gnostics had recourse to strange doctrines, borrowed from the Syncretism of the age. By introducing all those foreign elements they undid their own work. They detached the new religion from Judaism only to confound it with ancient superstitions which Judaism had long transcended. But the idea that lay behind their extravagant systems was a true one, and survived in all later Christian thought when the systems themselves were forgotten. They realised, as the Church had not yet done, that Christ had not merely continued an old tradition but had brought a new message, direct from God.

(2) They were genuinely Christian, too, in their insistence on the principle of freedom. Paul had contended that in place of a law or a stated doctrine Christ had imparted a living Spirit, under whose guidance each believer was to search out the truth. He rightly perceived that this exercise of freedom was vitally bound up with the new teaching. Through Christ men had entered into an immediate fellowship with God; they were set free from ancient forms of bondage; they were subject to no other control than that of love, and fidelity to the truth. The liberty proclaimed by Paul had inevitably led to abuses, and in the reaction from it the rule of the Spirit had given place to outward custom and enactment. This restriction was necessary if the Church was to hold together; nevertheless, it was alien to the genius of Christianity. It is significant that the rapid growth of heresy coincided with the effort to impose a set doctrinal and ecclesiastical system. No doubt the heretics pushed the Pauline doctrine of liberty to a dangerous excess. The ultimate effect of their protest was to necessitate a further tightening of the bonds on

individual freedom. Yet the protest itself was based on a true feeling for the nature of the religion, and to this cause we must largely ascribe the success of the Gnostic propaganda. At a time when the gospel was hardening into a mechanical creed the heretics asserted the idea of liberty. Their claim to a higher knowledge had its ground in their belief in that Spirit which Christ had bestowed on his people that it might lead them into all truth. The final suppression of the heretical movement involved an irreparable loss. Christian thought was delivered from the vagaries of Gnostic speculation, but it became arid and formal, incapable for more than a thousand years of free development.

(3) The heretics performed a notable service by their endeavour to ally the Christian teaching with the science and metaphysic of the age. Their constructions were no doubt fantastic, even when judged by contemporary standards. Their arbitrary explanations of the origin of evil, the union of the soul with matter, the process of creation, the meaning and destiny of the world, had often little to do with genuine philosophy, much less had they any connection with the realities of religion. We cannot wonder that the Church placed its ban on these visionary hypotheses. If they had become part and parcel of Christian theology, the gospel would have been hopelessly smothered under a mountain of absurd and irrelevant belief. Yet this work of speculation, however rashly it was performed, was necessary if the religion was to acclimatise itself in the ancient world. As a result of Greek philosophical discipline the Hellenistic mind was averse to any theory which could not somehow be applied to the whole scheme of things. In Christianity it looked for an answer not only to moral and religious problems but

to the whole riddle of the universe. Such an answer the Gnostics sought to provide, and however impossible their teaching may now appear to us, we cannot but admit that they were grappling with real difficulties, some of which they brought within the field of thought for the first time. That these problems were not entirely alien to the gospel is evident from the fact that the later Christian teachers—Irenæus, Clement, Origen, and his successors—while rejecting the Gnostic conclusions, were compelled to face the questions which the Gnostics had raised. Their work consisted, to a great extent, in the rebuilding of the Gnostic theology on a new basis, in accordance with the acknowledged principles of the Christian teaching. With this task, it may be said, the mind of the Church has been largely occupied, down to our own day.

In a number of ways, then, the heresies made a positive contribution to Christian thought; but their chief service, as we have tried to show, was a negative one. The new religion had accepted the Hellenistic ideas, in the confidence that by means of them it could more adequately express its message. For a time this confidence appeared to be justified; but in the hands of the "false teachers" the alliance with current speculation had produced a type of doctrine which was felt to be subversive of Christian faith. Why was it that a process in itself legitimate had led to this result? In the endeavour to answer this question the Church was compelled to reflect more deeply on its own beliefs, and to lay stress on those which at all costs must be preserved. As a consequence, it had to sacrifice much that was valuable. A restriction was placed on the earlier freedom. The door was closed against influences from without which had helped to broaden and clarify the original teaching. A purely dogmatic interest came to overshadow every other. But if there was reaction, it was towards those things which were distinctively Christian. The facts of the gospel history were reaffirmed, as against the speculations which tended to dissolve them. The demands of Christian morality were clearly formulated. A central value was assigned to Christ, as the one Mediator between God and man.

The conflict with the false teaching thus affords us the decisive answer to the theory that historical Christianity broke away from the authentic gospel, and represents in the main a borrowed religion, based on first-century Syncretism. Up to a certain point this view is tenable. The new religion when it passed over to the Gentile world undoubtedly became Hellenised. It threw its beliefs into theological moulds, provided for it by contemporary thought. The doctrines thus formed came to bulk so largely that they might seem to overwhelm the gospel and change it wholly into a speculative system of the Hellenistic type. But this change was only apparent. Beneath all the new forms the identity of the religion persisted, and repelled the foreign influences as soon as they seriously threatened it. Hitherto they had been welcomed ; now the Church began to concentrate on those aspects of its teaching in which it differed from the thought of the age. It discovered that its message had no significance apart from those elements in it which were not borrowed but were inherent in itself. So in the light of the great controversy which was fought out in the second century we can see what had really been happening in the previous age. At first sight it might appear as if the part of the new religion had been a merely passive one.

It had been thrown into the ferment of Hellenistic culture, and had supplied a nucleus around which all kinds of belief had accidentally gathered. The amalgam which resulted was finally systematised under the name of Christianity. But the truth is that the process had at no time been fortuitous. The Christian message had been the controlling factor in its own transformation. From the chaotic mass of contemporary ideas it had selected, by a sort of magnetic power, what was in harmony with its intrinsic nature. On all that it borrowed it had stamped a new character. When this was no longer possible, when elements sought entrance into the religion which could not be wrought into its own substance, the reaction began.

The struggle with false teaching is itself a forgotten chapter in early Church history, but it possesses a permanent interest. It furnishes the first example of a conflict which has been in process ever since, and which has determined the whole course of Christian development. Our religion has always been open to external influences. It has assimilated to itself the thought of each successive age, and depends on this receptiveness for its vitality and enrichment. The danger is always present of its conceding too much to those new elements. Again and again it has seemed to abandon its own position in the anxiety to keep itself fully responsive to the moods of contemporary thought. But the danger has never proved more than a transient one. The Christian ideas have never failed in the end to master the foreign contributions and adapt them to their own purposes. By this, more than by anything else, they prove their inner vitality, their accordance with the ultimate facts of life. Our religion since the first days has transformed itself many times over. It has made room for all the new knowledge and the larger activities which have come into being in the course of twenty centuries. Yet in its essential nature it has never changed. At the heart of it, under all the varying forms, there has always been the revelation which was given once for all through Christ.

CHAPTER IX

THE RISE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The outstanding fact in the history of the early Church was the progress of that unifying movement which was finally to have its outcome in the Catholic system. It was formerly the custom to associate this movement with a great apostasy. There seemed to be nothing in common between the simple brotherhood of the earliest days and the vast hierarchy, under one autocratic head, which dominated the world in the Middle Ages. The change could only be accounted for on the theory that Christianity had been wrested from its true nature by some malign influence. It stood no longer for the gospel proclaimed by Jesus but for a sacramental cult, a complex intellectual creed, an arrogant policy directed to worldly ends. Long before the Reformation, men had become acutely conscious of the difference between the earlier Church and the later. They sought vainly to discover how the corruption had first set in.

We are now beginning to see that the transformation was due to causes which were already operative in the New Testament period. They worked eventually in a manner that could not be foreseen, under the pressure of historical conditions; and the Reformers were justified in denouncing the later Church as unfaithful to the primitive model. None the less, it had grown out of the attempt to realise the early ideal. From the beginning the Church regarded itself as a single organism. It was composed of many separate groups, widely differing from each other in practice and belief; but together they were supposed to constitute the one Ecclesia, the elect people of God over against the world. It was never doubted that a day would come when all the scattered fragments of this holy brotherhood would be finally united. "As this broken bread," says the Eucharistic prayer in the Didache, "was scattered upon the mountains, and being gathered together became one, so may thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into thy Kingdom."[1] For a long time the Church was content to think of this unity as a sublime hope, only to be fulfilled in that new age when the Kingdom would be visibly established. Each little group was jealous of its independence. Deep lines of cleavage divided the Jewish from the Gentile Churches; each prominent teacher had his own following; there was one well-marked type of Christianity at Antioch, another at Ephesus, another at Rome. An intelligent observer at the time of Paul's death would doubtless have predicted that the new movement, after the triumphant advance of the early days, was bound to disintegrate into a number of petty sects, hostile to one another and drifting ever further apart. But towards the end of the first century the development took a different and unexpected turn. Instead of breaking up, the communities drew closer together. The various types of Christianity began to coalesce in one uniform type. Answering to the ideal oneness of the Ecclesia, there grew up a vast organisation which gradually took the form of the historical Church.

We can now see that a number of influences were working together to bring about this change. (1) It arose, in the first place, from the natural operation of forces within the Church. The different communities, while standing separate, were all engaged in a common enterprise and tried to support each other. Paul, by his cherished scheme of the collection for the poor at Jerusalem, had appealed to this sense of mutual obligation. Perhaps there was already floating before his mind some plan for federating all the Churches. The itinerant ministry served as a means of union. All through the first age the leading missionaries passed from place to place, superintending the separate groups; and although the system was gradually found unworkable, it held the Church together and maintained a certain common standard of belief and worship. Most of all, the mere lapse of time made for a growing unity. Before the century had ended, Paul and Apollos and Cephas and the other leaders whose names had been party watchwords were all dead, and the old animosities had died with them. The author of the Book of Acts has often been suspected of some sinister purpose because he slurs over the undoubted dissensions among the primitive Apostles. But it is more reasonable to assume that he simply reflects the natural desire of a later generation to forget old differences. Leaders who had once been in opposing camps were now great figures of the past, whose memory was revered by the whole Church. It remembered only their common services in the cause, and cared nothing about their quarrels. For that part, the issues on which they had opposed each other had now lost their meaning. When Jerusalem had fallen, and the new religion had identified itself definitely with the Gentiles, the original lines of cleavage were obliterated. The contending forces were now willing to join hands.

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[1] *Didache*, 9.

(2) The Church owed much to the persecutions which threatened for the time being to shatter it. Under pressure of the common danger the various groups learned to sink their differences. They realised that they were fighting on the same side, and must stand or fall together. The First Epistle of Peter, whatever may be its origin, bears striking witness to this new sense of comradeship which was the fruit of the persecutions. A teacher in Rome addresses his fellow-Christians in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, consoling and encouraging them. In face of the danger to which all were exposed those who professed the name of Christ could now feel themselves one. Not only does the Epistle testify to the growth of unity, but it illustrates the effect of the persecutions on the faith of the Church. From beginning to end it dwells, with an exquisite simplicity, on the larger Christian beliefs. Abstract and controversial issues have fallen, for the moment, out of sight. We are made to feel that the Church has become conscious again, in this fiery trial, of the real interests for which it stands.

(3) Even more effective in promoting the cause of unity was the inward danger from the heretical movement. Sects were everywhere arising which held aloof from the main body of Christians, and it was increasingly evident that, if the Church was to maintain itself, it must present a firm front against these tendencies to division. It is a matter of history that the rise of the episcopal system was closely associated with the resistance to heresy. For Ignatius the assertion of the bishop's authority and the preservation of the traditional faith are one and the same thing. And as each community sought to exclude the inroads of heresy by a more compact organisation, so the Church as a whole now aimed

at uniformity. The various groups which held firmly to " the faith which was once delivered to the saints "[1] began to enter into a closer fellowship. We hear for the first time of the " Catholic Church "[2]—the Christian communion as a whole, over against the dissident sects.

(4) The consolidation of the Church was helped forward by the pervasive influence of the Roman imperial system. It had been the task of Rome to impress on the world the idea of order and co-operation, and as it grew up under the shadow of the Roman dominion the Church unconsciously took on the character of the great political organism. Each community sought to model its administration on that of the municipality of which it formed a part. Groups of communities aimed at a solidarity in some way resembling that of the secular government. From the outset the idea of universality had been implicit in the Church, and the Empire furnished the example of how this idea might be practically realised. Indeed, the Empire itself had forced this example, in a strangely emphatic manner, on the attention of the Church. In the effort to bring home to the diverse races the fact of their union in a common state it had imposed a new cult, consisting in the worship of the emperor. To Christians this attribution of divine honour to a human being was abhorrent, and the early conflict between Church and Empire turned mainly on this issue. None the less, the worship demanded for the imperial " Lord " was one of the prime factors in quickening the sense of Christian unity. Through the Book of Revelation there runs the sense of a decisive struggle, now in process, between Christ and the Antichrist, who will take the form of a deified

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[1] Jude 3.

[2] The term first appears in Ignatius (*Ad Smyr.*, 9).

emperor.[1] In the light of the new cult the Church has obtained a glimpse of its own destiny. It has been made aware that it is a state within the state—a spiritual empire which owes allegiance to another "Lord."

(5) Perhaps nothing contributed so much to the emergence of the Catholic Church as the dying out of the early enthusiasm. In the primitive age no formal unity was felt to be necessary. The believers were "all of one heart and one mind."[2] Under all differences of race and doctrine they were inspired by the same devotion and were conscious of their brotherhood. Every great movement begins with a passionate enthusiasm, to which all regulations appear superfluous and unworthy. But a time comes when this spontaneous ardour grows weaker. It must be replaced by settled rule and organisation, or the movement goes to pieces. This crisis came for Christianity towards the close of the first century. The seer of Revelation laments that many whom he addresses had "lost their first love."[3] The writer to the Hebrews tells his readers that in former days they had been strong in faith and had cheerfully endured all hardships, while now they were "drifting away."[4] All over the Church there was this melancholy feeling that the Christian spirit could no longer maintain itself by its own strength. If the Church was to hold together, its worship must be organised, its beliefs must be clearly formulated, the fact of its unity must be embodied in an impressive system.

These factors all worked together in the development of the catholic idea. It first reveals itself in something like a definite form in the later New Testament period, but it was implicit in the religion from the first, and had a twofold root. (1) On the one hand, the Christian brotherhood was ideally one. It indeed existed in many separate communities, scattered through different lands, but these all constituted the one Ecclesia—the elect people of God which was to inherit the new age. When the Fourth Evangelist ascribes to Jesus on the eve of his death a prayer for the unity of his disciples,[1] he no doubt reflects the catholic sentiment which had arisen in his own time. But he also gives vivid expression to an idea which had truly lain at the background of Jesus' own teaching. By his message of a divine Father whose love embraces all men, Jesus had sought to overcome the old separations and unite his followers in a common will. He desired that as children of the Kingdom they should be all one, and this aspect of their calling was ever present in the minds of Christians. Paul has constant occasion to rebuke the dissensions which broke out from time to time in his churches, and the note he strikes is always the same. He appeals to the underlying conviction that all believers, by the very nature of their calling, form a single family. Can the body of Christ be divided? Must not his followers strive to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?[2] From the outset the Church was feeling its way towards some means of asserting this fact of its oneness in the service of Christ. It did not at first try to achieve this end by ecclesiastical system; such a method was contrary to that belief in the Spirit which determined the whole outlook and activity of the Church. Yet we have to recognise that the later system had its basis in an essentially Christian idea.

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[1] Apparently Nero, restored to life and coming up from the "abyss" (xvii. 8), as Christ had risen from the dead. The persecuting emperor seems to be conceived, at every point, as the Satanic counterpart of Christ.

[2] Acts iv. 32.

[3] Rev. ii. 4.

[4] Heb. x. 32 f., ii. 1.

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[1] John xvii. 21.

[2] Eph. iv. 3.

(2) On the other hand, the Catholic conception grew out of a sense of the ultimate oneness of the Christian teaching. It might be presented from many different points of view. It might give rise to many different sects and parties. Yet amidst all the many-sided debate that marked the first age there was always the feeling that all Christians were intent on the same truth. Paul puts away from him with abhorrence the very suggestion that there could be "another gospel."[1] The Church was founded on "one Lord, one faith, one baptism."[2] In the earlier time no definition was offered, except in the vaguest terms, of what constituted Christianity. All the teachers had their own explanations, and as we study them now they seem widely at variance. Yet there was always the conviction that the differences were only in appearance. The many statements of doctrine were nothing but tentative endeavours to reach the one truth which was the gospel of Christ. We would now say that this truth was something which could not be summed up in any formal statement. It consisted in a spirit, an attitude of will, a power that made for newness of life. All who possess the mind of Christ, although they may differ in their interpretations, are holding the one gospel. The Church, however, was intent on formulating a "confession" which would commend itself to all Christians as embodying the vital truth which underlay their religion. It may have been a mistaken effort, but it was the outcome of a genuine feeling for the identity of the message beneath all its variations.

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[1] Gal. i. 8.

[2] Eph. iv. 5.

The catholic system, therefore, was grounded in the authentic Christian ideas. It has often been represented as a departure from the original conception of the Church, but it resulted, rather, from the effort to return to it. The Church had begun as a single community, bound together by a common faith. In the century that followed, this one community had been severed into a great number of local groups, all of them with their own special interests. The one message had been interpreted in many different ways, and no one version of it could be selected as authoritative, to the exclusion of the rest. How was the original unity to be restored ? No other course was possible than to try to recover it by a fusion of all the varieties of custom and doctrine which had grown up in the interval. For a long time the process was necessarily a tentative one. As yet there was no recognised machinery by which the Church could arrive at an agreement, and enforce the common decision. No one leader had the right of priority over the others. Church councils, such as fixed the accepted creed at a later time, were out of the question. Paul, indeed, who led the way in so many directions, had anticipated the idea of a council when he went up to Jerusalem with his associates to discuss the question of the Law with the primitive Apostles. This, however, was nothing but a consultation between the leaders of two opposing groups, and from all that we can gather their attempt to lay down a binding rule had little result. The temper of the Church was still such that no interference with liberty could be successful, and in the next generation the communities still clung jealously to their independence. Moreover, they were now so numerous and so widely scattered that no general meeting of their representatives could be effected. Two centuries later, when a Christian emperor offered all facilities for a council of the whole Church, he could only bring together an assembly that was almost wholly Eastern. In the days of the persecutions a general council was plainly impossible. The task of securing uniformity had therefore to be carried out by silent and gradual agreement rather than by authority. There were churches of acknowledged standing—Antioch, Ephesus, Rome—to which the others were willing to defer. What was believed in those churches, founded by great Apostles, was presumably in full accord with the true Christian faith. It was found, too, that teachers representative of different parties were now increasingly disposed to come to an understanding with each other. The very fact that the communities had become large, and were composed of members widely differing in temperament and modes of thought, was likewise helpful. How were these miscellaneous bodies to unite in the same faith? Most of their adherents were obviously earnest in their Christianity, but they had come to it by many paths, and were at different stages of Christian experience and knowledge. Some of them had been attracted by the apocalyptic promises of the gospel, some by its ethical teaching, some by the mystical speculations which were now part of it. To insist that they must understand it in one way and no other was to drive them into the heretical camps. If the Christian faith was to be such that all might find room in it, the aim must be to make it comprehensive. Those aspects of it which had hitherto been pressed one-sidedly must somehow be brought together. It was mainly in the effort to meet this great practical problem that the new formulation came insensibly into being. The desire of the Church was for unity, and in view of the prevalence of heresy it was necessary that the genuine Christian beliefs should be clearly set forth. But it was also necessary, if the unity was to be anything more than illusory, that they should be conceived in a comprehensive spirit. The Christian demands must be so stated that all who were honestly seeking salvation through Christ should be able to accede to them without reserve. In all the communities this effort to reach a uniform and inclusive statement of belief was more or less consciously in process.

As we examine the later books of the New Testament we can make out the general lines of this later development. (1) Types of doctrine which had hitherto remained separate were now united. In the Epistle to Hebrews, for example, a philosophical conception of the work of Christ stands side by side with the early apocalyptic one. In the Fourth Gospel almost all the prevailing tendencies in Christian thought are brought together. The evangelist is in sympathy at once with Paul and with the primitive Apostles; he assails the heretical teachers and yet adopts some of their characteristic positions. This "union of opposites" in the Gospel has been made the chief argument for the theory that it is a work of composite authorship. But we are rather to think of the evangelist as a man of catholic outlook who wishes to preserve all the elements which have found a place in Christianity. He is working consciously in the cause of unity, and writes a Gospel for the whole Church. At the risk of inconsistency he presents a many-sided teaching in which all Christians will be able to discover their own beliefs.

(2) In order that conflicting views might be brought into harmony they were softened and adjusted. Some-

times little more was necessary than a different emphasis. Ideas which in one type of thought had been of central importance were retained in the composite scheme, but were now made secondary. Sometimes the modification required a change of meaning, although the original ideas were formally preserved. This was particularly the fate of the great Pauline conceptions—faith, grace, the Spirit, salvation through the death of Christ. These were all given a prominent place, but they were taken out of their Pauline context. A value was sometimes assigned to them which was wholly different from that which Paul intended, or which almost inverted it. Faith, for example, was construed as the mere act of belief, and was thus subordinated to works. The Spirit, which for Paul had been the principle of Christian liberty, was connected with Church authority, to which all Christians had to subject themselves. The grace of God was no longer His love and goodness as manifested in Christ, but some peculiar virtue resident in the sacramental rites.

(3) Increasing importance was attached to the visible expressions of Christian piety. The Church was composed of men and women who varied in their modes of belief, but in one way they could be brought into agreement. They could unite in certain appointed acts of worship, especially in the sacraments, which were now made central to the religion. In like manner the Christian, whatever might be his opinions, was bound to observe a given code of conduct. He might understand little of the motives and sanctions which lay behind it, but in this visible manner he could declare himself a Christian man. So from this time on we find two great notes in Catholic Christianity. On the one hand, it demanded a ritual and sacramental

piety ; on the other, a sound morality. In these two respects the duty of the Christian appeared to be clear. However he might interpret the gospel, he could at least be faithful to the Church observances and seek in his outward behaviour to obey the precepts of Christ. This reduction of the Christian requirements undoubtedly served to promote the cause of unity, although in the end it entailed that formalism which was to prove the bane of the later Church.

(4) A strong emphasis was now laid on the idea of the Church itself. The institution tended to take the place of the religion for which it stood. This also was the inevitable consequence of the effort to secure uniformity. Few men are capable of loyalty to an abstract truth ; all men can attach themselves to an institution—their country or party or the organisation to which they belong. The struggle for ideas has always taken the form of a battle for those concrete institutions which make them intelligible to ordinary men. In early Christianity, therefore, devotion was concentrated more and more on the visible Church. This was the organism through which Christ was working, the embodiment of all he had taught and purposed. Allegiance to the Church could be nothing else than allegiance to Christ. Here, again, we can perceive the need for the later development. Without that loyalty to the Church which was now instilled into all Christians as the first of religious duties, unity could never have been secured, the age of persecution could not have been endured triumphantly, the Christian faith itself could not have been maintained. Devotion to the Church supplied a new and stable source of enthusiasm, and took the place of that early apocalyptic ardour which had now waned. Yet this zeal for an institution brought a confusing ele-

ment into Christian piety. In later times it could be exploited by unscrupulous leaders in interests directly contrary to those of the gospel.

(5) The exaltation of the Church as an institution was combined with a mystical doctrine. We have already seen that from the beginning the Church was more than an ordinary society. It claimed to be the outpost of the heavenly community and to be endowed with mysterious privileges. Paul had imagined the Church as the larger body in which Christ was reincarnated, and this conception was worked out more fully and carried to sublime issues in the Epistle to the Ephesians. Catholic Christianity took up the doctrine of the Church as the visible body of Christ. It was assumed that he dwelt in the Church and used it as the vehicle through which he imparted his divine life. As members of the Church, partakers in its sacraments and in the Spirit which controlled it, men were brought into mystical communion with God.

In this later period, therefore, the aim was to build up a Christianity in which all who called themselves Christians could agree. Such agreement could only be reached by compromise and by emphasis on those aspects of the religion which were acceptable to the average mind. The essential Christian teachings were preserved, but in order to find their place in the new scheme of belief they had too often to be modified, and severed from their inward motive. The Catholic movement, it must be borne in mind, arose during the conflict with heresy. It was necessary in that critical time, when the faith was in danger of being submerged by foreign speculations, that Christians should know definitely what they believed. All those ideas which had come down from the Apostolic teaching were brought together, and were included in a "Confession" which was held to be binding on all members of the Church. But the opposition to the heretical opinions was also extended to the attitude of mind which had led to them, and which could not unjustly claim to be that of the earlier Apostles. Paul and his fellow-workers had thought of the gospel as of a truth which needed to be examined and unfolded, under the guidance of the Spirit. They refused to accept any particular statement of it as final. They made it the very mark of a Christian that he should not be content with any doctrine taught of men, but should press forward to a more inward and immediate knowledge of his own. It was in this temper that the heretics had pursued their inquiries. They had assumed that there was a deeper meaning in the gospel, and were bent on discovering it, even when they followed their search by a false light. The liberty granted them had proved dangerous, and the Church now took its stand on authority. That which was vouched for by Scripture, that which had been taught in former days by the Apostles, could alone be accepted. There must be no re-examining of the primary beliefs, for this could only lead to fresh divisions. All further investigation of the truth must be grounded on the received Confession. This is the attitude of the writer to the Hebrews when he declares that "the principles of the doctrine of Christ"[1]—the truths handed down as authoritative—are to be simply accepted. He himself is eager for a higher knowledge, and requires of his readers that they should seek after it, but it must be a knowledge that takes the admitted principles for granted. Now, if Paul had attained to deeper insight into the message, it was precisely because he had accepted nothing from men. It was the "rudiments of the doctrine"—its ultimate sanctions and purposes—with which he was most concerned. By its condemnation of this attitude of mind the Church doomed itself to centuries of sterility. While it co-ordinated the earlier beliefs it took them over mechanically, and failed to relate them to their real issues. The test which it applied was not "Does this doctrine accord with the divine purpose as revealed in Christ?" but merely "Can it claim the support of some eminent name? Does it reflect the mind of the majority, or at least of some outstanding community?" Such criteria were fatal to any true advance.

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[1] Heb. vi. 1.

The aim of the Catholic movement was to consolidate the old beliefs against foreign influences; but this could only be done by yielding in large measure to those influences. Thus it came about that the very effort to put a check on the process of borrowing completed the fusion of the alien ideas with Christianity. (1) For one thing, those ideas had found entrance in the time which was now regarded as one of doctrinal purity. They had passed hitherto as guesses and speculations, and later thinkers were free to discard them or replace them by others. Now they were definitely incorporated in the Christian tradition. No one remembered that they had been adopted in more or less tentative fashion from Pagan religion and philosophy. It was only known that Paul and other revered teachers had made use of them, and henceforth they remained, not as mere suggestions, but as an integral part of the faith. One striking example is the doctrine of the descent of Christ into the underworld. In the Epistle to Ephesians this idea is employed in little more than a figurative sense.[1]

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[1] Eph. iv. 9, 10.

In 1 Peter it reappears, much more explicitly, but is still incidental, and carries with it no doctrinal significance.[1] Finally we find it embodied in the Apostles' Creed as one of the fundamental articles of the faith. In like manner that whole mythological drama which Paul had used as a background for his religious teaching was now accepted literally. It no longer served to visualise ideas which were essentially moral and religious, but had a value of its own, and was made the basis for further speculation of the same kind. A return to the original faith proved to be impossible. No line could be drawn between that which was primitive and that which had been taken over, in undoubted Apostolic teaching, from some outside source. (2) Again, concession had to be made to popular Christianity, which often failed to distinguish between what was Christian and what had been derived from Paganism. The aim of the Catholic movement was to offer a religion which should unify the Church by including all that was commonly believed. But the great mass of Christians had come over from Paganism, and had brought with them their Pagan habits of thought. If the new statement of belief was to be acceptable to them, it had to represent not so much the enlightened ideas of the great Pagan thinkers as the naive religion of the multitude. The result was that in the new Christianity much that belonged to popular Paganism obtained a fresh lease of life. To be sure, in the time with which we are concerned there was no Mariolatry, no worship of saints or adoration of images or adaptation to Christian uses of the ancient Pagan festivals and forms of ritual. But the causes were already at work which were to bring about these changes. In the effort to maintain its hold on the great masses of half-instructed converts the Church was compelled to adapt its message to their understanding. It availed itself of traditional customs; it sought to express the new spiritual ideas by means of concrete and familiar forms. A process of this kind is always necessary before religion can make its due appeal to a miscellaneous public; but it happened to be carried out just in the age when Christianity was fixing itself in the catholic mould. Practices and beliefs which had their origin in Pagan mythology were thus crystallised in the permanent faith of the Church.

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[1] 1 Pet. iii. 18 f., iv. 6.

It cannot be said, therefore, that the new movement was wholly successful in excluding the foreign influences. This is apparent not only from the character assumed by the popular religion but from the strictly theological development. The Fathers, from Justin onward, are strongly Hellenistic in their thinking, although they aim at defending the Catholic position. Unawares to themselves they have often more in common with the great Gnostic masters than with the Apostles. There is truth in the view that historical Christianity takes its departure from Hellenistic thought. At the time when the attempt was made to return to the primitive teaching the religion had become so thoroughly Hellenised that no restoration was possible. The uniform faith on which the Church placed its seal was a product in large measure of the Hellenistic movement. Yet this is only half the truth, and has often been presented by modern writers in a manner that is totally misleading. By adopting the Catholic basis the Church did succeed in stemming the inroads of Paganism. It ensured that the religion which was in due time accepted by the whole Empire should be in a real sense Christian, and not a mere hybrid growth in which Christian elements were included.

(1) In the first place, the Apostolic teaching was established as the necessary foundation for all later Christian thought. This teaching had indeed been largely Hellenised, but the Apostles were still so profoundly in sympathy with the authentic gospel that they could not lose themselves in speculative side-issues. In all their thinking the Christian ideas were made central and determinative. It was the supreme service of the Catholic movement that it rested all later Christianity on that account of the gospel which is contained in the writings now brought together in the New Testament. The writings may have been selected on grounds which were sometimes uncritical, but undoubtedly the result was to preserve and consecrate the earliest documents of our religion. The message was here set forth as those men understood it who were nearest to its beginnings, who were best able to appreciate its original purpose. Their interpretation of it was now made authoritative. The religion was to stand henceforth on " the foundation of the Apostles and prophets."

(2) Again, it meant much for the security of genuine Christian ideas that all believers were now united in a Catholic Church. In the struggle with heresy an appeal had been made to opinions generally accepted. The three criteria which were afterwards to be summed up in the famous formula, " Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus," are recognised by Irenæus; and for that part they are already implied in New Testament controversy. It is assumed that true Christian doctrine must conform to the belief which has always prevailed, and which is accepted everywhere by the great mass of Christian men. Now it is obvious that the test is by no means infallible. A belief may be held by all for no other reason than that it has been held always,

although it may have nothing behind it but long-established custom. If the test is rigidly enforced, it means the end of all progress. Not only so, but it means the denial of the fundamental Christian idea of a living revelation through the Spirit. These fatal errors in the Catholic position have been abundantly illustrated by many a melancholy chapter in the history of the Church. None the less, there is a value, which in our time is too readily forgotten, in the old criteria. In matters of faith and life, as distinguished from mere facts of knowledge, the common opinion is most likely to be true. It gathers up the results of experience; it reflects the consensus of many different minds instead of the guess or the delusion of a few. In all times this general agreement has been the necessary corrective of individual thought. It may be based on custom, but it also has its roots in the primary instincts and sober judgments which will not permanently tolerate what is false. When all is said, it was not the arguments of the polemical writers that overthrew Gnostic heresy, but the common sense of the Church at large. Some of the Fathers had little more feeling for what was essential in Christianity than the heretics whom they denounced. They sought to replace the erroneous systems by others which had just as little to do with the facts of the gospel. But in the mass of Christian people the sense of reality always survived. They were struggling day by day with the urgent problems of life, and the far-fetched Gnostic theories were useless to them. No doubt their religion often expressed itself in crude, illogical forms, and the work of the theologian was necessary to make it reasonable and coherent. But they remained faithful to the Christian conception of God and the Christian morality; the Christ they believed in was not a metaphysical principle but a personal Saviour. Gnosticism, with its perverse imaginations, made shipwreck in the end on this larger feeling, which may be trusted in all times to safeguard the true interests of Christianity. They may be mistaken by individual thinkers. They may be represented one-sidedly in particular movements. But the sense for what is vital and enduring in the religion will always be preserved in the general mind of the Church.

The aim of these later teachers, then, was to unify the Church on the basis of a comprehensive creed, harmonised with the earlier tradition. How far did this enterprise involve a new departure? The question is of the first importance, for the religion which took shape in the later New Testament period has remained, in its broad features, the religion of Christendom. It was elaborated and defined by the various Councils, and was modified in many directions by the forces of history; but when we speak of Christianity to-day, we think of that Catholic Christianity which even the Reformation, while relieving it of many accretions, did not fundamentally change. Our judgment of it, therefore, must depend on what took place at that critical time towards the end of the first century, when the Church began to gather up its beliefs into a "confession" which should be acceptable to all believers. We are frequently told that the result was the substitution of a composite Hellenistic religion for that of Jesus. It is maintained that during the two generations after his death the original gospel had become hopelessly obscured, and that the Christianity on which the world has been living ever since, although calling itself by the name of Jesus, has little in common with anything he taught. How far can a view like this be substantiated?

It cannot be denied that, in the endeavour to gather up the existing beliefs and combine them into a religion for all, the Christian teaching underwent a serious modification. From what has been said already we can perceive the nature of the change.

(1) In the first place, the religion was now grounded on authority. It was indeed made as comprehensive as possible, by including all the types of belief which had hitherto been held by different parties in the Church. But the "confession" was supposed to rest on the Apostolic testimony, and any inquiry into the validity of this acknowledged basis of the faith was discouraged. Enough to know that here was the Christian belief as set forth by the earliest teachers, who had presumably received it from Christ himself. It may be argued that this authoritative fixing of doctrine was historically necessary. Without it no resistance could have been offered to the false teachings. Without it, so far as we can see, the Church would have broken up into a multitude of sects, and could never have accomplished its world-wide mission. Yet the religion of liberty could not be reconciled with the principle of outward authority. From the beginning the contradiction has made itself felt, and has brought endless confusion into the life of the Church. Faith has been identified with something that was its exact opposite. The Christian spirit has been able to assert itself only by breaking away from official Christianity.

(2) Again, the reliance on authority involved a falling back on legalism. Paul had fought his great battle on the issue that the Law was no longer binding. His argument was directed against the specific Jewish Law, but it had a far wider application. He discerned that Christianity, as a religion of the Spirit, was radically

opposed to all conceptions of the service of God which required obedience to mere statutory rule. The Christian ideal was that of a harmony of man's will with the higher will, such as would make all outward law unnecessary. "Walk in the Spirit, and ye will not fulfil the lusts of the flesh."[1] But with Catholic Christianity the Law came back again. We have seen already that in the Gospel of Matthew, written under the influence of the Catholic idea, Jesus is conceived as a legislator, uttering principles for man's guidance which are to displace the commandments given "to them of old time." After the turn of the century this conception of the gospel as the New Law became the prevailing one, and underlies all the later interpretations. In one form or another it has maintained its place to this day. It rests on the assumption that Jesus meant to legislate for all the manifold activities of man's life. Schemes have been drawn up which profess to set forth this new Christian law in all its details, while the teaching of Jesus has been chiefly criticised on the ground that it neglects one aspect or another of human obligation. Now it may be admitted that the statement of the Christian demands in the form of definite rules was needful. In a great miscellaneous body of men it was impossible to expect that every one should be so controlled by the Spirit as to know for himself on every occasion how he ought to act. Clear signposts had to be erected to point him at all the turnings in the right direction. Yet this formulation of a Law meant a departure from the Christian idea. It was entailed by the need of keeping all believers within a uniform Church, and had no ground in the message of Jesus. He had demanded a new will, springing from a new relation to God. It had been his object that men should learn to direct their own lives—making new rules for their action in accordance with changing conditions, but keeping always faithful to the higher will. The conception of religion as a statutory law was precisely that which he had set himself to destroy.

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[1] Gal. v. 16.

(3) In like manner Christianity was now construed as a system of beliefs. As yet there was no attempt to define a regular creed, but it was understood that all Christians must hold the right opinions in matters of doctrine. It would appear that at Baptism the candidate was asked a series of questions which he was required to answer in the correct sense. This was his "confession," ensuring that he truly accepted the gospel, and eventually its main elements were summed up in the so-called Apostles' Creed. Such insistence on right belief was in one sense nothing new. From the outset all converts had made some declaration of their belief, and out of this practice had grown the idea of faith as the distinctive mark of the Christian. An assent to certain principles must obviously be the foundation of any intelligent religion. But in early days the beliefs which had to be accepted were broad and simple—that Jesus was the Messiah, that he had risen from the dead, that he would come again to bring in the Kingdom. These were the primary facts of the Christian message, and by acknowledging them the convert proclaimed his loyalty to Christ. Belief, indeed, for the primitive Church, implied an attitude of heart and will much more than a state of opinion. It found its characteristic expression in the watchword, "Jesus is Lord." How the believer thought on matters of doctrine, how he conceived of Jesus' relation to God and the manner of his Incarnation, was of secondary importance. To such questions he might give his own answers. He might explain

the nature and work of Jesus in any manner that enabled him to reach a vital conviction. Paul explained them differently from his fellow-Apostles, and is not fully consistent with himself. The essential thing was the attitude of will, the heart-felt allegiance to Christ and acceptance of his gift. But in the later teaching belief was identical with right opinion. The obligation was laid on the Christian of holding certain prescribed views. A man might possess the saving loyalty to Christ, but unless he could answer the given questions in the way that the Church required, he could not be admitted to full Christian standing. This emphasis on right belief was the necessary safeguard against heresy. The heretics made use of the traditional formulæ, but attached meanings to them that might be utterly contrary to Christian teaching. There had to be some method of determining what the convert precisely meant when he made the required confession. Did he hold the faith in Christ in that real and personal sense apart from which it would be worthless ? Hence came the need of defining the beliefs, and when the process once began, the definitions became ever more exact and intricate. It followed, too, that increasing emphasis was laid on these theological statements, and finally they were the one important thing. Not the loyalty to Christ but the manner in which you thought about him, the intellectual framework of your faith, made you a Christian. We cannot but recognise that in this magnifying of mere doctrinal issues there was a grave danger.

(4) Moreover, the doctrines themselves were now emptied of much of their significance. It was desired to co-ordinate all existing beliefs in a logical system, and this could only be done when each one of them was so

smoothed out and circumscribed as not to encroach on the others. It was also desired that all sections of the Church should be able to unite in the one confession. To ensure this agreement all the doctrines on which there had hitherto been difference were now presented in a form that should be distasteful to nobody. This meant too often that they were made colourless, and ceased to have much reality. It is the weakness of all official creeds that they are arrived at by a process of compromise in which all parties abandon something of their conviction. The result is a formula which no one can accept with absolute sincerity. In the earlier time there was no visible adjustment such as took place in the Councils of the fourth and fifth centuries, but the same process can be clearly traced. We have seen how the great Pauline doctrines were toned down in the later New Testament teaching. In the Epistle of Clement and the Shepherd of Hermas some of the primary Christian beliefs retain little more than a formal value. They are still assumed to be primary, but all vital force has passed out of them. It is the paradox of the Catholic system that while its chief aim was right doctrine, it tended to nullify doctrine. The beliefs which were declared to be cardinal acquired real significance only in movements which broke off from the Catholic body and were therefore condemned as heretical.

(5) Once more, the original message was obscured by the preponderant weight now thrown on form and ritual. It was only in this manner that a church made up of many miscellaneous elements could hold together, and from one point of view the method was fully legitimate. Worship has always been the binding force in religion. People who differ profoundly in their thinking

and belief can yet unite in common worship. The early Church rightly availed itself of those helps to union which were offered in its sacraments and pious customs. It taught its members to associate these sacred ordinances with all that was most precious and intimate in their faith. Yet in doing so it entered on a dangerous path, which was to lead eventually to a perversion of the very meaning of Christianity. Jesus had protested against the identification of religion with outward forms. He had taught that the true service of God consists in moral obedience. He had spoken of a spiritual worship which would continue, without interruption, though the Temple should be destroyed. The Christianity which found its centre in ritual and ceremonial acts was manifestly at variance with his purpose.

In all these ways the Catholic movement entailed a break with the genuine tradition to which it professed to return. There is a measure of truth in the contention that it changed Christianity into a different religion. Yet on a deeper view it succeeded in the main in effecting its purpose. Historically, as we can now see, the new construction was necessary. If it had not been undertaken, the result would have been, not a purer Christianity but the disappearance of Christianity altogether. In order to preserve itself from the destructive forces, without and within, the Church had to unite, and could do this only by securing uniformity in its teaching. But even when we consider the movement from the purely spiritual side we can recognise that it was justified. While in some respects it made for the narrowing and externalising of Christian ideas, its main effect was to develop them and make them more fully operative.

There were elements in the teaching of Jesus, and these among the most important, which came to their own for the first time in the Catholic Church.

(1) The effort to combine all types of faith in one system was not wholly due to the need of satisfying the various parties and so forming a church in which all Christians could work harmoniously together. It had its deeper motive in the intrinsic nature of the religion. We are accustomed to speak of the "simple gospel," and imply by this phrase that Jesus taught a perfectly simple message, which the Church has wilfully complicated. Now it is true that there is nothing abstruse in the teaching of Jesus. It deals in the language of every day with facts and experiences which are familiar to all men, and with the great realities which never change. Yet the more we examine it we discover that it is capable of endless application, and presents different aspects to different minds. This became apparent as soon as it was taken out into the larger world of the first century, in which a hundred diverse currents of interest were crossing one another. All the various schools of thought laid hold of the new religion, and they all understood it differently. It was construed as an apocalyptic summons, as a philosophy, as an ethical or social propaganda, as a mystical way. These interpretations were widely at variance, and the parties which represented them were often in bitter conflict; yet each of them brought out in a one-sided manner something that was really present in the gospel. It was the service of the Catholic Church that it sought to combine all the diverse interests. By so doing it might seem to introduce confusion, and to teach doctrines that were mutually inconsistent. It was often obliged, as we have seen, to dull the edges of one belief in order

to fit it into the others. Dissident sects arose from time to time which insisted on particular truths that had been unduly neglected. But we can now see that our religion would have been gravely impoverished if the teaching of Peter or Paul or James or John had been made solely authoritative. Their different interpretations may not be in full accord, but they are all valid and necessary. The message of Jesus had many implications, and could not be adequately understood from any one point of view. It was the aim of the Catholic movement to embrace within the one Church all the types of thinking which were seemingly in conflict, but which all called themselves Christian. We cannot attribute this aim to mere policy or indifference. It must be explained in the last resort from a genuine effort to do justice to the manifold elements which are present in the gospel, and which all alike are necessary to its completeness.

(2) Again, the Catholic Church was meant to be the visible embodiment of the primary Christian truth that God is the Father of all, and offers His salvation to all. "There is neither Greek nor barbarian, there is neither bond nor free, but all are one in Christ Jesus."[1] Ancient religion was by its nature exclusive. The old national religions existed for the very purpose of maintaining the divisions between race and race. The mystical and philosophical cults were open to all, but were essentially aristocratic. Their higher teaching was kept secret; they deliberately fostered the belief that men were separated by inborn differences, and that privileges must be reserved for the chosen few. This attitude had found its way into Christianity. The heretical sects made their appeal to the instinct

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[1] Gal. iii. 28.

for division, and drew a sharp line between natural and spiritual men. They accepted as self-evident the principle that salvation is for a small minority, and restricted the higher knowledge to their own following. It was this exclusiveness, inherent in the whole character of ancient society, to which the Catholic movement opposed itself. Its protest took a doctrinal and ecclesiastical form. The principle was laid down that all types of opinion should be recognised, and that the Church, with all its local and racial divisions, was yet one. We must needs acknowledge that the effort to establish this principle led to many evils, which became more pronounced as time went on. The universal Church became tyrannical. It sought to reconcile all doctrinal differences by insisting on one mechanical rule of faith. In its anxiety that all should be included in the Christian fold it was willing to tolerate lower standards, to which the least spiritual of men should have a chance of attaining. It construed Jesus' desire that all should come to him in the sense that he would be satisfied with a faith that was little more than nominal. Yet undoubtedly the Catholic Church stood for one of the primary truths of Christianity. It sought to realise the fact of brotherhood in Christ, irrespective of race and class and intellectual endowment. It taught men to think of religion not as the power which separates but as that which draws together. This idea is magnificently set forth in the Epistle to the Ephesians—the New Testament writing in which the conception of a universal Church first comes to clear expression. " For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners but fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and the prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone."[1] With all its shortcomings the Church has never ceased to reflect this great ideal.

(3) The central conception of Jesus had been that of a Kingdom of God, which would finally be established on earth. His anticipation was certainly very different from the fulfilment which was given to it in the later Church. The Kingdom of God, as he conceived it, was to put an end to all existing institutions. In that great future when the will of God would be the sole law, and all men obeyed it gladly and spontaneously. such institutions would be no longer necessary. The old order, based on rule and authority, would give place to the new order of the Kingdom. In the earlier Christian communities this idea of Jesus was still operative. It was understood that the new society had nothing in common with those around it, but was subject solely to the control of the Spirit. Its unity consisted in the submission of all its members to the higher law. But with the rise of the Catholic movement the idea of Jesus seemed to be forgotten. Already in the Gospel of Matthew the Kingdom is confounded with the organised Church, and the Parables and Sayings are so modified as to bear out this interpretation. In the Fourth Gospel the whole work of Jesus is regarded from the later ecclesiastical point of view. He is above all the Founder of the Church. The record of his teaching culminates in the great prayer for that future society of his people in which he will be glorified. Subsequent theology took for granted the identity of the Kingdom with the Church—the City of God which

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[1] Eph. ii. 14, 19, 20.

had been preparing through all the changes of history. Such views, it may be argued, were a perversion of the thought of Jesus. His spiritual ideal was confused with an institution, and shared in its debasement as it became corrupt and worldly. The whole meaning of Christianity was in danger of being lost when the Church of the Byzantine emperors or the mediæval Popes laid claim to be the Kingdom of God, in which Christ had fulfilled his promises. None the less, it was through the Church that the message of the Kingdom became effectual. With all its imperfections it stood visibly for the things of the Spirit, it kept men mindful of the hopes which had been proclaimed by Jesus. The Catholic Church had hardly come into being when the troubles began which were to shatter the Roman Empire. In those centuries of conflict and dissolution the thought of a better world, in which men would be united in a single brotherhood working for spiritual ends, could never have survived if it had existed only as an abstract ideal. But the fact of the Church gave it actuality. Augustine was able to point to this institution as standing for man's higher life, and could declare that some day all other interests would be gathered into it. So, in all times since, the Church has been the pledge of the Kingdom. By its very existence it has impressed on men that the unseen things are real, that a community is possible which will transcend all national divisions, that God will reign at last over the world. The problem of our religion, as of all religions, is so to present its ideals that men will feel them to be certainties, and live for them just as earnestly as for any material ends. It has been the inestimable service of the Church that in some measure it has given this actuality to the primary conception of Jesus.

The Catholic movement, therefore, made for the conservation of the great Christian interests. Some of its results were no doubt calamitous, as must always happen in the effort to translate an ideal into material form. It is easy to fasten on these, and to show that by adopting the new system our religion suffered a perversion. Just as in the earlier time it had conformed itself to Hellenistic thought, so it now took on a hard-and-fast organisation, after the pattern of Roman government. Nevertheless, in the one case as in the other, it employed the forms given it for the assertion and development of its own inward principles. If in this later period there was a declension from the lofty spiritual religion of the New Testament, we must also remember that this was pre-eminently the age of the martyrs. Those Catholic doctrines which we are wont to think of as barren and artificial were yet able to foster a passionate loyalty to Christ. They produced lives which have stood out to all generations as shining examples of the Christian spirit. This was no accident. It was only in its modes of expression that the religion had changed its character ; but the truths at the heart of it were always the vital truths of Christianity.

So the Church sought to attain to unity on the ground of those issues which were fundamental to its faith. In this endeavour it sometimes went astray and lost its hold of principles which we can now see to have been no less essential than those which it preserved. But the large effect of the movement was to establish the beliefs which were not peculiar to any sect or party but were simply Christian. When all allowance is made for the subsidiary causes which worked towards unity we cannot doubt that the ultimate motive was that of Christian brotherhood. Love was of the essence of

Christianity, and men could not hold this religion without trying, in some practical way, to give effect to it. In the light of that movement towards union which is everywhere manifest in our own day we can best understand the movement in the early Church. Ever since the Reformation there have been forces which made for division, but the churches have now grown anxious to sink their differences and draw together. They are bent on discovering a basis on which they may build a larger, more comprehensive Church. Now, as in the early period, this desire may be traced to a number of causes—the need for uniting against common enemies, the need for economising energies and resources, the breaking down of racial and social boundaries, the change in the world's whole outlook which has followed the Great War. Yet surely it would be unjust to explain the movement in terms only of those secondary causes. Behind it is the sense, which was never entirely lost even when controversy was sharpest, that the work of Christ is one. By joining hands with our brethren we can do something to realise his purpose for the world.

It is this sense of a principle inherent in the very nature of our religion which, in the last resort, explains all movements towards union, in ancient times and now. Yet we do well to recognise that another principle is also Christian. The primitive Church was content with a unity which was ideal rather than actual. Believing that the service of Christ must be inward and spontaneous, that each man must be free to interpret the gospel for himself, it avoided all efforts to impose an outward uniformity, and acknowledged no control but that of the Spirit, which often led the most earnest of Christians into widely divergent paths. We have to reckon with two principles, apparently contrary to each other, which have been at work in our religion from the first. There has been an impulse towards closer organisation, and another towards diversity and freedom. Whenever the one has appeared to triumph, the other has insisted on its rights. Both of them—the position of Paul and the early Apostles, and that of the Fourth Evangelist and the Fathers—are equally Christian; how are they to be reconciled? Perhaps no formal solution of the problem will ever be possible. Along with the closer unifying of the Church there will always persist the impulse towards freedom. The ideal Church, although as yet it is hardly conceivable, would be one in which all members would be united in the closest bonds and yet all entirely free. Apart from this free operation of the Spirit there can be no true body of Christ.

CHAPTER X

THE GOSPEL AS BORROWED AND CREATIVE

We have now considered the changes which came over our religion in the period covered by the New Testament. The period is limited to one out of twenty centuries, and the close of it finds the Church still struggling for bare existence, with at most a dim prevision of the mighty task and the new experiences which lay in the future. Yet in that first age it had assumed the character which, in all essential respects, it has maintained ever since. The later centuries were to bring marvellous changes, alike in the outward constitution of the Church and in the interpretation of its message. But these have been all in the nature of a development of what was already there. The historian of England can determine a date, previous, we are told, to the Norman conquest, when English institutions had taken their definite form. The fusion of the principalities into a strong kingdom, the rise of daughter nations and of a world-wide empire, were still to come; but all has followed, as by an inevitable law, from the achievement of that remote time. So the historian of the Church can trace the gradual unfolding of the practice and government and belief which had taken shape in the obscure Christian communities of the first century.

In that formative period itself we have to do with something else than a process of development. When we contrast the religion of the primitive days with that of the early Catholic Church, we feel at once that there has been a radical change. A religion of the Hebrew type has become mystical and speculative; moral and apocalyptic beliefs have given place to theological doctrines; a free brotherhood, governed only by the Spirit, has turned into an organisation, based on the principle of authority. It is evident that new forces, never contemplated in the original teaching, have come into play. The religion has been not merely developed but transformed; the stream has mingled with another and has been deflected into a new channel. It is not surprising that many writers have felt driven to the conclusion that the Christianity which succeeded that of the primitive age was practically a new creation. The name of Christ was preserved; the watchwords of the earlier message were still respected; certain customs and beliefs served to link the religion with its historical origins. But it had become essentially different. Some unexpected element had entered into it, and it was this which henceforth determined its character.

Now there can be no doubt as to the change which came about in the course of the first century; but did it involve a wholly new departure? This is the grand question which confronts us in the early history of our religion, and in the preceding chapters we have attempted to answer it. Before gathering up the conclusions to which the inquiry has brought us it will be well to consider the change itself. Several theories have been held as to its nature and cause.

(1) According to one view it can be accounted for without any need for assuming a new and disturbing influence. After the death of Jesus his disciples naturally thought of him and construed his message in an altered light. They looked back on his life as it was now

interpreted by the marvellous events which had crowned it. The earthly Master became for them the invisible Lord, and their faith in his teaching was inseparable from an intense personal loyalty. It was this change of attitude, consequent on the death of Jesus, which gave rise to the new understanding of his gospel. Now in this contention there is an element of truth which must not be neglected. There are clear indications that in the earliest days, before any foreign influence had time to make itself felt, the message had begun to change its character. It was this new mode of conceiving of the work of Jesus which made the later construction possible; but it is not sufficient to account for it. The teaching of the primitive Church, however it differed from that of Jesus himself, turned at least on the same broad ideas. It dealt with the nearness of the Kingdom of God, the need of repentance, the fulfilment of the ancient promises, the hope of salvation in the coming Judgment. In the later time we meet with a different set of conceptions—the new birth and the higher knowledge, the worth of sacraments and the participation in the divine nature. We have to do, not with the same message apprehended from another point of view, but with a different message. Some factor has entered into it which cannot be discovered in the recorded teaching of Jesus.

(2) Another theory, which at one time was widely entertained and still finds its supporters, would derive the later interpretation from a strain in Jesus' own teaching which has been neglected in the Synoptic tradition. The disciples, as the Gospels themselves acknowledge, did not at the time fully understand their Master. They were obviously men of no very deep intelligence, whose religion had been moulded by the ordinary teaching of the Synagogue. In presence of a wonderful

original mind like Jesus they were bewildered. They could feel that here was a divine message, but were only able to appreciate it in its more superficial aspects, and in the recorded Sayings and Parables we have only this side of the thought of Jesus. It was realised gradually, in the light of fuller apprehension, that there had been another side. At least one saying which reflected it found its way even into the Synoptic narrative.[1] The Fourth Evangelist, deriving his knowledge from the Apostle John if he was not himself the Apostle, was intent wholly on that profounder element in the teaching which the others had overlooked. A parallel is often drawn between the twofold gospel tradition and the two accounts of Socrates which are given by Xenophon and Plato. Both of these accounts may be accepted as true, but the mind of Plato could reach out to a whole hemisphere of his master's thought which was dark to the man of plainer understanding. The parallel is indeed a striking one, and at first sight there is much that is plausible in this theory of a double strain in Jesus' teaching. It is undoubtedly valid in so far as it assumes that there was much more in Jesus' thought than those who listened to him were able to discern. From this point of view it has real light to throw on our problem, for it serves to remind us that the Sayings, however simple in appearance, are of far-reaching import. The later development, however it came about, did not change the teaching of Jesus into something deeper. At the most it only disclosed more fully what was actually there. The highest categories of thought needed to be called into service to elucidate those apparently simple sayings. But just at this point we can perceive the error of the theory as commonly stated. No distinction can be drawn between the ordinary teaching of Jesus and a supposed esoteric wisdom which he imparted to an inner circle of disciples, for his thoughts are deepest when they appear most simple. He cannot have had anything to say which touched more closely on the innermost secrets of religion than the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer and some of the Parables. In other words, the contrast of the Synoptic Gospels as the more superficial record, and the Fourth Gospel as the deeper and more spiritual, is utterly misleading. A contrast there certainly is, but it in no wise resembles that between Xenophon and Plato. The Synoptic teaching is no less profound than that of the Fourth Gospel, but it belongs to a different type. In the one case we have the ideas of Jesus as he seems himself to have expressed them; in the other, the same essential ideas are conveyed in quite a different form.

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[1] Matt. xi. 27; Luke x. 22.

(3) A further theory would explain the new interpretation on the ground of native Jewish thought. From the outset Jesus had been regarded as the Messiah, and we cannot reasonably doubt that he himself made the Messianic claim. In what sense he made it we cannot now determine. Most probably he troubled himself little about the details of the Messianic conception, and employed it quite generally as the only one offered him, in contemporary Judaism, for describing the part which would be his in the bringing in of the Kingdom of God. For the primitive Church, too, the Messianic idea was an indeterminate one. When the disciples tried to conceive of Jesus as Messiah they fell back on vague Old Testament prophecies, or on the ordinary apocalyptic ideas current among the people. But in the Rabbinical schools those ideas had been developed in a theological manner. More especially in the Juda-

ism of the Dispersion it is more than probable that abstruse speculations had grown out of the Messianic hope, and when the Christian message was taken up by men versed in Jewish theology these more advanced theories came into play. It is significant that in the writings of Paul additional details, to which no parallels can be found elsewhere, are read into the Messianic career of Jesus. He had existed before his coming to earth "in the form of God";[1] he had kept his fidelity instead of aspiring, like some other, to equality with God;[2] he was the "man from heaven" and the second Adam;[3] he was the Rock which had accompanied the people in the wilderness.[4] Such details cannot have been invented by Paul. He plainly has in his mind elements of Messianic theory which were familiar to the trained Rabbi, although they had found no place in the simpler Apostolic teaching. With the aid of such suggestions he was able to amplify the message he had received and to work it out in new directions. It has been maintained, therefore, that in this manner we must account for the apparent change in Christian modes of thinking. That new interpretation which has been set down to alien influences may be accounted for by the action of ideas which were purely Jewish. The hypothesis is one which must not be lightly set aside. It is far too often forgotten that there are large tracts of Jewish thought in the first century of which we know nothing. If the writings of Philo had not been preserved by fortunate accident, we should hardly have suspected the all-important Alexandrian movement. It can hardly be doubted that at other centres in the Roman world—perhaps in Antioch or in Paul's native city of Tarsus—there were Jews like Philo, who were seeking to develop the traditional ideas in new directions. Christian thinkers, we may be sure, would be eager to borrow from these Jewish sources ideas that might help them in the exposition of their message. A great deal which in our ignorance of the full situation has been ascribed to foreign influences may well have been a legitimate inheritance of early Christianity from the parent religion. Yet this theory also fails to explain the cardinal facts. Much in the teaching of Paul and his successors is manifestly non-Jewish. The old Messianic conception is not developed or supplemented, but another, based on different presuppositions, is put in its place. In all types of Jewish thought, even in the philosophical Judaism of Philo, the Law is accepted as fundamental. No thinking which in any sense called itself Jewish could have any other ground. Yet in the later Christianity there is a complete break with the Law. In any case, even if we attribute the later development to Jewish influence, we only come back at one remove to the previous difficulty. Paul and the others may have drawn on some form of Judaism, but it must have been a Judaism impregnated with foreign ideas. There is nothing in the Old Testament or the literature that followed to account for the new speculations. They may have entered Christianity by way of Judaism, but this does not alter the fact that they were alien to Jewish thought.

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[1] Phil. ii. 6.

[2] Phil. ii. 6. Paul appears to contrast the attitude of the pre-existent Messiah with that of Lucifer as conceived in some Rabbinical exposition of Isa. xiv. 12.

[3] 1 Cor. xv. 45–47.

[4] 1 Cor. x. 4.

(4) So we are thrown back on another hypothesis, which is almost certainly the true one. The Christian message, in the generation after Jesus' death, came under some entirely new influence, and in this manner

suffered a transformation. There can be little doubt as to the nature of this disturbing influence. Within a few years of its emergence at Jerusalem the Church had embarked on its Gentile mission, and ere long was mainly identified with the Gentile world. In the new environment it adapted itself to the Hellenistic modes of thought. A time was to come later when it extended its work beyond the Roman Empire altogether, and evangelised the Northern tribes. In this migration the gospel underwent no serious change. The Germanic and Slavic races had reflected little on the great problems of life and religion ; they had nothing of their own to contribute, and were content merely to shed off the old superstitions and accept the higher faith. But the peoples of Greece and Asia Minor were heirs of an ancient civilisation. They were familiar with the ideas of great thinkers who for centuries had been meditating on the ultimate questions and had arrived at far-reaching conclusions. Not only so, but in that very age when the gospel made its entrance into the Hellenistic world a spiritual revival was in progress. Men were interested as never before in the great religious issues, and were seeking in manifold ways to attain to a higher life. The Christian teaching could not but be affected by this intellectual and religious ferment into which it was now thrown. Men were not satisfied merely to receive it ; their own minds reacted on it ; they sought to combine it with the truth they had already won and so to enhance its significance. That this was what happened we can clearly see when we look at the character of that later Christian teaching. As contrasted with the primitive gospel, it bears the unmistakable Hellenistic stamp. The ideas of Paul and the others have parallels, often of the closest kind, in Philo of Alexandria, in Epictetus and Seneca, in the mystery cults, in the succession of mystical thinkers which culminated in Plotinus. Christianity, as a result of its contact with the Hellenistic world, was Hellenised. How the process was effected, and to what particular agencies it was mainly due, we cannot now determine; but there can be little question of the broad fact. That influence from without which gave a new bent to our religion in the time between the death of Jesus and the close of the century was that of Hellenistic thought.

What, then, was the nature of the transformation? It has often been summed up in the epigrammatic statement that the religion of Jesus became a religion about Jesus. He had himself spoken of the Kingdom of God, and had taught how men could attain to it by acknowledging God as their Father and obeying His will in the ordering of their lives. In the teaching of the Church, the centre of gravity was shifted. The things which Jesus believed were thrust into a secondary place, and he himself was made the object of faith. It was assumed that the salvation of which he had spoken had been achieved by his own act, and he thus became the hero of a cult, similar to those of the Pagan divinities. Within a short time, indeed, all the ideas and practices of the cults were transferred to Christianity. Instead of the prophet of a better righteousness Jesus was a divine being, who had descended from heaven for man's redemption. The aim of his worshippers was to enter into mystical communion with him and so participate in the divine life. A sacramental system was devised for the purpose of effecting the due fellowship between the Redeemer and his people. Now in this account of the difference of later from primitive Christianity there is certainly a measure of truth. The most striking feature of the new interpretation is the prominence given to Jesus himself. It is more than probable that this exaltation of Jesus may have owed something to the prevailing cults. To this influence may have been due the decisive step of investing him with a divine character and conceiving of union with him as the grand object of Christian faith. Yet the contrast of the religion of Jesus and the religion about Jesus is essentially a false one, and has been responsible for many misleading theories of early Christianity. It is true that in the Synoptic teaching Jesus says little concerning himself. He bids men set their hearts wholly on the Kingdom. He seeks to awaken a faith directed not to himself but to God. In one passage, which has caused perplexity ever since the Gospels were written, he disclaims the title of "good," and declares that none is good save God alone.[1] Yet in the religion of Jesus we cannot overlook the significance of Jesus himself. His teaching about God cannot be separated from his own sense of an immediate relation to God. He proclaims the Kingdom in the full assurance that he has power to lead men into it, and that somehow it will be fulfilled through him. To regard him as the neutral medium of a new revelation is to take the very heart out of his message. He was himself the revelation. All that he taught was vitally bound up with his own character and life and work. When all is said, no theory of outside influence is necessary to explain how the religion of Jesus transformed itself into a religion about Jesus. It has always been the instinct of human nature to apprehend ideas through personalities. The hero and martyr of a cause becomes himself the cause; through their devotion to him men are able to understand and work for it. We need not wonder that after the Crucifixion the message which Jesus had taught became identified with Jesus himself. This did not mean that it was forgotten, or gave place to a different kind of message. On the contrary, it was now brought home to men in its full grandeur, and moved them with a living power. Undoubtedly a change came over the religion in the generation following Jesus' death; but it was not due to the transference of interest from the message of Jesus to Jesus himself. So to regard it is to make it quite inexplicable. It was precisely because Jesus was central to his religion and had been so from the first that the change became possible. Christianity was inherently a religion about Jesus. If it had not been so, it would have remained a purely ethical system, and would never have admitted of any radical restatement. For the reason that it had its true centre in Jesus himself, men were compelled to reflect more deeply on what he had been and had accomplished, on his relation to the world and to God. Questions arose which opened the door to large speculations, so that the whole nature of the religion underwent a change. It was ultimately the central value which from the first belonged to Jesus that conditioned the later development.

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[1] Matt. xix. 17. Cf. Luke xviii. 19.

What, then, was the real character of the change to which the religion was subjected in the course of the first century? It consisted, generally speaking, in the Hellenising of the original message. The truth proclaimed by Jesus under Jewish forms of thought was interpreted by a different order of ideas and thereby took on a new appearance. It is always so when the spiritual possession of one race or culture is adopted by another. The Latin language passed over to Gallic and Teutonic tribes, with the result that all its elements were poured into another mould. Minds of a type altogether different from the Roman expressed themselves through this medium, and by so doing insensibly formed new languages. In like manner the architecture of the South was transplanted into the Northern countries, and the basilica became the Gothic cathedral. Not only were roof and windows adapted to other climatic conditions, but the whole significance of the building was altered. Such a change was inevitable when Christianity threw in its lot with the Gentiles. The Hellenistic mind had its own traditions, its own modes of envisaging the divine life and the need of man, its own religious vocabulary and philosophical forms. When it allied itself with this new culture the gospel underwent a change. Not only was there readjustment here and there but a complete remoulding.

We have seen how the transformation affected some of the primary Christian conceptions, and it is necessary to look again at these changes, which could never have come about by any normal process of development. (1) In the first place, a new character was attributed to Jesus. Already the emphasis had been thrown on his Person rather than his teaching, but it was owing to the Hellenistic influence that he was exalted to actual divinity. The Messianic idea, with which Christianity had started, was foreign to the Gentile mind. So was the Hebraic attitude to God as the Creator and Sovereign, who stood absolutely apart from all things that He had made. It was taken for granted that all supreme benefactors were in some manner divine, and the title of "Lord," as applied to Jesus, acquired a new meaning.[1] He was in a literal sense Son of God, and through him the higher nature had been brought within the compass of human life. All theories of the work of Christ were now determined by this belief that he was a divine being.

(2) Again, the purpose of the Redemption was conceived differently. For Hellenistic thought the root of all man's misery was his existence under material conditions. A renewal was needful, but it must affect not merely the will but the very nature of man. So the stress was laid on this essential change which Christ had made possible. It was assumed that the renewal of nature must precede the moral renewal; and this involved a new understanding of the message in its whole extent. Some power was inherent in Christ whereby man became a new creature. Himself divine he had brought men into such fellowship with him that they were made partakers of his higher nature.

(3) In the new interpretation the ideas of the religion were expressed metaphysically. The Gentile world was now permeated with the Greek conception that man's highest activity was that of knowledge. Philosophy had set itself to explain the world in terms of reason, and although the hope of a final solution along this line had now been abandoned, the idea persisted that religion and philosophy were ultimately one. Religion consisted in the knowledge of those higher realities which

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[1] There is no ground for the assumption that the name "Lord" was itself borrowed from the Hellenistic cults. It seems to have been employed from the first (cf. the primitive watchword "Maranatha"; the baptismal confession "Jesus is Lord"; the surname of James "the Lord's brother"). The Hellenistic influence is responsible not for the name but for the significance attached to it.

lie behind all visible things. With this Greek emphasis on knowledge was combined the Greek desire to view the world as an intelligible whole. It was not enough to think of Christ as the Redeemer. His work of Redemption must be brought into harmony with the general system of the universe. It must be grounded in some consistent theory of the nature of God and the origin and destiny of the soul. Jesus himself had offered no metaphysical basis for his gospel. He had taken for granted that the relation of man to God was a moral one, and that by obedience to God man would attain to the true life. The Hellenistic mind sought to get beneath this ethical conception. It aimed at apprehending the Christian message in a manner that would fully satisfy the reason. God was the absolute Being; Christ was the Logos through whom God manifested Himself; eternal life consisted in participation, by means of the Logos, in the nature of God. A doctrinal system, ever more complex, formed itself around the facts of the gospel, and the teaching of Jesus himself was made subordinate to this construction.

(4) The doctrinal interpretation went hand in hand with sacramental ideas. Religion, in the Gentile world, was everywhere associated with rites which were supposed to carry with them a mysterious efficacy, and this belief in sacraments had been accentuated in the first century by the Oriental cults. It has been maintained in recent years that the Christian sacraments were Pagan in their origin. According to the New Testament, they had been observed from the beginning; but here, it is argued, we have merely the attempt to secure a sanction in primitive custom for usages which came in later, through contact with the Gentile religions. Such theories, however, may be confidently dismissed

as fanciful. Nothing is more certain than that Baptism was practised by John, and from his example it seems to have been adopted by the Church at Jerusalem. The institution of the Supper by Jesus is the best attested incident in the gospel history. Paul expressly describes it, in one of his earliest Epistles, as a fundamental element in the tradition.[1] Not only so, but the ideas connected with it in the gospel narrative are entirely different from those involved in the Mystery rites. There would have been little object in inventing a story which had no relevance to the practices it was supposed to sanction. Here, however, we see the true nature of the Hellenistic influence. Christianity from the first had observed two simple ordinances, by which the believer declared his loyalty to Christ and his confidence in the Christian hopes and promises. In the Gentile world these became sacraments in the full sense. Religion for the Gentiles was inseparable from stated rites which were held to effect, in some miraculous way, a spiritual change. This wonder-working power was now attributed to the Christian observances. The mystical ideas attached to the Pagan rites were transferred to them, and the whole Christian teaching came gradually to hinge on the sacraments. They were regarded as the necessary channels of the divine grace, the appointed means whereby man availed himself of the redemption achieved by Christ. A value was ascribed to the ordinances themselves quite apart from the inward processes of faith which they typified. The sacramental character of later Christianity may thus be set down to the foreign influences, and at this point, more clearly than anywhere else, we may perceive the nature of the change which came over the religion.

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[1] 1 Cor. xi. 23.

This, then, was the transformation effected in the course of the first century. Christianity was Hellenised. In place of the original message, proclaiming a salvation through faith and moral obedience, Christ was worshipped as a divinity, and his message was construed in the light of speculative and mystical ideas. That our religion was profoundly modified not only in form but in substance by this change is undeniable. We cannot wonder that to many it seems to have emerged as a completely new religion. They conceive of Jesus as providing at most the initial impulse. His teaching offered the suggestion of a new way of life. His personality gave an adequate figure around which the loftiest speculations could gather. But the gospel history itself was only a bare nucleus. Everything essential in Christianity came in from the outside. In that Roman world there was a wealth of spiritual life, but it was all in confusion. Myth and philosophy, religion and superstition, were mingled together. The Christian message provided a necessary centre ; it enabled the chaotic religion of the time to co-ordinate and clarify itself ; but beyond this it contributed almost nothing. What henceforth bore the name of Christianity was not any specific type of belief but a precipitate of all the beliefs which had matured and coalesced in that world of the first century.

Now it cannot fail to strike us, at the very outset, that this theory rests on assumptions which are hardly conceivable. No one can doubt that the men of the first age accepted the gospel in a spirit of intense conviction ; and yet we are asked to believe that they quietly discarded all that it really signified and put something else in its place. Such things do not happen in known experience. A movement may indeed take a direction very different from that which its first leaders intended, but it continues to be the same movement. If it appears to change, the reason most often is that its essential principles have had time to unfold themselves, and are more fully understood than was formerly possible. Again, we are asked to believe that the Pagan world was hardly conscious of anything peculiar in Christianity. It was silently accepted as one of the religions in vogue, and was gradually assimilated to the others, and reigned at last in their stead. This is directly contrary to all that we know of the facts. From the very outset the Gentiles, whether they were attracted or repelled by the new religion, were keenly aware that it differed from all others. This sense of its unique character became stronger as time went on, and its principles were more fully understood. In the work of Celsus, written about the middle of the second century, we have a criticism of the Christian teaching by a typical Pagan observer. He bases his whole argument on the evident fact that this religion has nothing in common with those which have hitherto prevailed. He sees in it the negation of all the ideals which have given meaning and strength to the ancient culture. It is opposed to rational thought and conduct, to social conservatism, to the principle of aristocracy, to the patriotic devotion which had been the glory of Greek and Roman history. In thus stating his case Celsus reflects the mind not merely of the multitude but of most intelligent men in his time. Can we believe that, in spite of this acute antagonism, Christianity was able to transform itself, without the knowledge either of friends or enemies, into one of the familiar cults ? That it did eventually absorb into itself the higher religious life of the age is certainly true ; but this did not come about by some automatic process. It was not merged in the Pagan religions, but overcame them. It came forward with its own message, which it compelled the world to accept, and thus won for itself all that was most valuable in contemporary thought. In the development which took place it was not a passive nucleus but the active principle.

At this point, too, we cannot but observe another error in many recent accounts of the first-century transformation. The new religion, we are given to understand, was radically changed by the foreign influence. Retaining at most a few nominal links with its Jewish past, it placed itself on a wholly different basis, and was henceforth a purely Hellenistic religion. Now a view like this tacitly assumes the very thing which has to be demonstrated. Did the Hellenising of the gospel involve a complete change? It is commonly taken for granted that Jewish and Hellenistic thought belonged essentially to two different worlds, so that there could be no transition from one to the other without an uprooting. But the truth is that the two modes of religion, for all their apparent contrast, did not stand so utterly apart. Jewish and Greek thinkers, when all is said, had been working on much the same problems. By different paths they had arrived at ethical positions which were broadly similar, so that it is often difficult to say which of them may have suggested certain elements in New Testament teaching.[1] They were at one in their conviction that man on earth is shut out from his true life and freedom, and that his great need is for deliverance. As we read Plato we are constantly arrested by ideas which seem to echo the Old Testament and to anticipate the Gospels and Epistles. For that part, as we have already seen, there was much in the Judaism of the first century which was historically related to Hellenistic thinking. It is significant that the early Christian teachers are themselves unconscious that in throwing their message into the new forms they are making a radical departure. The modern critic can distinguish what was Jewish and what was Hellenistic, and assumes that there must have been a deliberate effort to replace one type of religion by another. Paul himself intermixes the two modes of thought, and never doubts that in both of them he is seeking to express the same truth. This confusion was possible only because, in the last resort, they were related. By their different categories the Jew and the Hellenist were intent on describing the same aspirations, the same conceptions of the higher life. The Hellenistic attitude was undoubtedly different from the Jewish, and our religion, by adopting it, changed its character. But the very fact that this change was made is sufficient proof that it was by no means so radical as has often been supposed.

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[1] *e.g.* the ethical teaching of the Epistle of James can be plausibly explained in the light either of Greek or of Jewish parallels.

We are not to think; therefore, of a displacement of primitive Christianity by a religion of different type. Nor can the change be accounted for by the action of Syncretism. This explanation has found favour with many modern scholars, and at first sight appears plausible. We know that Syncretism was characteristic of the age, and that all the Pagan religions were strongly affected by it. Must we not assume that Christianity also was caught in the prevailing movement? It may have preserved many of its original principles, and even secured for them the central place. But just as the communities of Attis, Serapis, Mithra, had their separate beliefs and yet borrowed freely from each other, so the Church developed a mixed religion.

The Christian elements were so blended with others, taken over from a variety of sources, that they ceased to be clearly distinguishable. It has seemed to many that the true solution is here to be found. Christianity, as it meets us in the later period, is not a changed religion but a syncretism—a compromise between the early teaching and the current beliefs. But this also is to misrepresent the process which actually took place. Syncretism was the result of mutual toleration on the part of religions which stood on an equal footing. Two Eastern cults, existing side by side, acknowledged their kinship and drew near to one another; the gods of the Roman Pantheon were identified with those of the Greek, and their festivals and rites of worship were brought into conformity. The recognition of equality belonged to the essence of the process. It corresponded in the religious sphere with the blending of two political constitutions in a common system; this, indeed, was the origin of the word "Syncretism."[1] But Christianity from the outset claimed to be exclusive. It set itself over against all rivals as the one true faith. "There are gods many, and lords many," says Paul, "but for us there is one Lord, Jesus Christ."[2] He expressly contrasts the Pagan attitude of mutual recognition with the Christian attitude. "The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have communion with demons. Ye cannot drink of the cup of the Lord, and of the cup of demons."[3] It was precisely because of its refusal to fall in with the syncretistic temper of the age that the new religion aroused general antagonism. It declined to take its place alongside of the other faiths, and insisted on its solitary claim to be the authentic revelation. To make out that it was a product of Syncretism is to overlook that one feature of it which stood out, in its early history, as most conspicuous. If it presents affinities with the other religions, if here and there it seems to have borrowed from the larger religious movement, this was not because it succumbed to it. The consciousness that it stood apart and had a truth to offer which was not to be found in other systems was never lost. From first to last it governed the processes by which contributions were drawn from alien sources. This, as we have seen, is the true significance of the conflict with Gnosticism. The Gnostic movement was a real effort to involve Christianity in Syncretism. It was felt that the religion stood to gain, in public recognition and in inward content, by joining forces with the rival cults and abandoning its earlier exclusiveness. But at this point the Church drew back. It perceived that to merge its message in the syncretistic beliefs of the age would be to destroy it altogether. Christianity must stand or fall as a unique and separate religion.

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[1] It was coined, apparently, to describe the attempt of certain Cretan communities to fuse their institutions.

[2] 1 Cor. viii. 5, 6.

[3] 1 Cor. x. 20, 21.

Another view of its relation to the Hellenistic cults may likewise be rejected. We are told that, although it never allowed itself to be simply absorbed by them, it yet adopted their customs and ideas with little or no change. As a consequence the original teaching came to be overlaid. The accretions were so many and so important that they buried the message itself, and a Christianity came into being which the first disciples would not have recognised. This theory of a wholesale mechanical borrowing has been worked almost to death by numerous recent scholars. Whenever a parallel to some Christian idea can be discovered in the philosophy or religious practice of the time, it is at once inferred that this had been taken over, exactly as it was. The later Christianity is resolved in this manner into a patchwork of which the various pieces bear little relation to each other or to the gospel to which they have been added. But in the spiritual domain there can be no mechanical borrowing of this kind. No idea can be transferred from one system of thought to another without at the same time acquiring a new significance, perhaps almost the opposite of what it had before. Our chief interest, as we compare different literatures or philosophies or types of art, is to observe how the old theme is changed in the new context. Historical inquiry is concerned, above all, with the transmutation of old customs and institutions when they are taken up into a new culture. Yet it has almost become the rule in New Testament investigation to detach every conception from its Christian setting. It is taken for granted that a Stoic reflection in Paul must signify just what it does in Stoicism. All that is novel in his thought is dismissed as accidental and irrelevant. By this method it is not difficult to prove that the later Christianity consists of little more than rude fragments of Greek and Oriental belief, lifted out of their true place and thrown awkwardly into a new combination. But the method is a radically false one. Its right would never be admitted for a moment if it were applied in any other field of inquiry. Borrowing always goes hand in hand with a process of assimilation which transforms that which is borrowed. And this is demonstrably so in the early history of our religion. There were many things which came in from the outside, but in every case they were adapted and modified and brought into inner relation to the new message of which they now became a part. With regard to the sacraments, for instance—where the affinity with Hellenistic religion is most striking—we cannot speak of alien rites simply taken over. Baptism, as it was practised in Christianity, was baptism "in the name of Jesus." Its whole significance was made to consist in the confession of Jesus which accompanied it, in the fellowship with Jesus which it brought to the believer. Sacred meals were common in contemporary religion, and the observance of the Lord's Supper was pretty certainly influenced by Pagan analogies. But for the Christian mind the Supper was the memorial of the death of Christ. It became the symbol of all that the Christian faith implied. It was the bond of union with the invisible Christ and with the Christian brotherhood. Whatever may have entered into these rites from the side of Paganism was brought into line with Christian ideas and was subordinated to them. The rites in their new form were changed into the distinctive rites of Christianity. In like manner we might review all those elements of doctrine which appear to have had their origin in Hellenistic speculation. Paul thinks, for example, of a mystical union with Christ, effected by fellowship with him in his death and resurrection. This conception may well have some relation to the cardinal idea of the mystery cults—that the initiate, by sharing the experience of the god, passed through death into a higher life. We are told that Paul simply transferred this belief to Christianity. The union with Christ on which his religion centred must be understood in just the same sense as the union with Attis and Serapis in the cults. Now in any case this method of explaining Paul's conception is more than dubious. Of the real significance of the mystery cults we know next to nothing. We have a few stray hints concerning the rites performed in them, but these may have meant much or little. They were bound up with a complex of ancient religious thought and sentiment to which they owed all their import and which is now unintelligible. But whatever was implied in the Pagan rites we know for certain that it had little in common with the doctrine of Paul. He had before his mind the actual fact of the Crucifixion and his own vision of the risen Christ. He connects his belief with his great conceptions of faith and the Spirit. He thinks of the new life into which the Christian enters in terms of moral renewal and inward fellowship with Christ. In all this new connotation the suggestions which he may have borrowed must inevitably have taken on a wholly different meaning. So with all the beliefs which passed from Pagan religion into Christianity. We cannot regard them as mere accretions, for by their adoption into the new message they have become an integral part of it. Their meaning is now to be understood in the light of their Christian context.

It must not be assumed, therefore, that as a result of the Gentile mission our religion in some way threw off its original character and took on another. A change there undoubtedly was, but it consisted in the employment of a new medium for the expression of the same essential message. The Church availed itself of doctrines, customs, modes of worship, a general religious outlook, which were strange to the early tradition. On a superficial view there might seem to be a complete transformation. Yet amidst all this change the message itself was preserved. Paul, who was so largely responsible for the innovations, insists that there can be no other gospel, no foundation except that which was laid ; and in this spirit the Church accomplished its work. The grand aim which it kept before it was to affirm the primary Christian ideas. It was on condition that these were maintained and made to inform and vitalise all else that the process of borrowing was carried forward.

We have already had occasion to examine those ideas which remained constant through all the change. It was felt that, however they might be interpreted, they formed the real substance of Christianity. So long as they were kept at the centre there could be little fear that the religion which survived and absorbed into itself all tributary elements would be anything else than the religion of Jesus.

(1) A cardinal significance was ascribed to Jesus himself. It was never forgotten that the religion had originated with him, that it all revolved around him, that its whole meaning was summed up in his Person and work. Theological doctrines were now associated with him which were foreign to his own teaching, and which in some measure obscured its import. But the underlying purpose of these doctrines was to emphasise the central fact that in him were to be found the springs of his religion. The relation of God to man must be apprehended through Christ. In the knowledge of him we have eternal life. He has gathered up in his own Person the ultimate meaning of the world. It is a strange perversity which would fasten on this preeminence assigned to Christ as the chief proof that the later religion was not, in the true sense, Christianity. We are told that for the message of the Kingdom it substituted the worship of Jesus himself. It conceived of

him not as he had actually lived but as a heavenly being' clothed with mysterious attributes. To a great extent this is true. Even in the writings of Paul, the historical Jesus falls into the background, and in the subsequent theology it is sometimes difficult to say whether he is a Person or a metaphysical abstraction. This fading of the realities of the gospel history was in many ways disastrous. A gulf was created between Jesus and the ordinary life of humanity, and it had to be filled up with the mediation of the Virgin and the tutelary saints. Yet the theology which transformed Jesus into a divine being was necessary even for a true understanding of his life. It was nothing, in the last resort, but the attempt to ensure, under forms of thought intelligible to the time, that he should be viewed in his true significance. He was not to be regarded merely as a sage or hero ; he was not to be confused with the gods many and lords many of the Pagan world, but was the unique revelation of God. A halo was woven around the figure of Jesus which has never since disappeared, and apart from which we cannot rightly appreciate the historical life. To be sure, we are now ceasing to think of his supreme mission in terms of metaphysical doctrine. We are learning to perceive his revelation in his moral attributes, in his manifestation of the love and goodness and redeeming grace of God. On other grounds than those of the Greek theology, but no less truly, we can reverence the divine nature in Jesus. But it was the theological process which moulded this sentiment of reverence. It secured that Jesus should hold a place apart, so that men should realise that in approaching him they drew near to God. By so doing it gave meaning to the gospel history. It laid the necessary basis for all later forms of Christianity.

(2) Again, with all its emphasis on knowledge and the sacraments, the Church maintained the moral standards of the gospel. In the later age, as in the earlier, Christianity was the religion of love and righteousness. To be a Christian was to observe the manner of life which had been supremely exemplified in Jesus. This alone is sufficient evidence that the new religion was always faithful to its beginnings. Whatever concessions it made to alien modes of thinking, it insisted, in the face of Pagan custom, on the Christian rule of life. Paul, in his ethical teaching, is absolutely at one with Jesus. The author of the First Epistle of John rests his case against the heretics on the ground that their superior "knowledge" has its outcome in selfishness, arrogance, aloofness. He holds it to be self-evident that a religion of this nature, whatever may be its spiritual claims, is not truly Christian. In the later Gnostic controversy this is still the decisive line of argument. Gnosticism is shown to stand condemned by its ethical results. One cannot but feel that far too much has been made, by writers on the early Church, of the mere doctrinal issues. When attention is concentrated on these, it is possible to maintain that Christianity was completely changed by the Hellenising process. But the purpose of Jesus, when all is said, was not so much to promulgate certain ideas as to create in men a new moral temper, a new principle of life. In his own teaching he always lays stress on this moral renewal. Again and again he declares in so many words that opinions and outward ceremonies matter little so long as the will is brought into harmony with the will of God. So in our judgment of the early Church the real question is, "Did it succeed in affirming that new way of life which Jesus inaugurated, and in which he placed the central meaning of his re-

ligion ?" The answer to this question can admit of no doubt. Amidst all the theological changes of the first century the Church never wavered in its moral attitude. Its aim was to produce in its members that type of character which had its great example in Jesus. This was so well understood by the surrounding world that the Christians were regarded as a people apart, a new race of men. It cannot be said that a Church which upheld so firmly what was most essential in its religion had abandoned it for another.

(3) Once more, the sense was never lost that Christianity was a power, given immediately by God for the attainment of a higher life. In the new doctrines which are supposed to have perverted the gospel we can discern the effort to express more clearly this truth, which was its central one. Jesus had declared that through him men might obtain the Kingdom of God. What they could not do for themselves was now achieved for them. Paul had taken up this message when he insisted on faith as the one condition of the new life. A redemptive power had entered the world in Christ, and nothing was required of men but to avail themselves of the divine gift. This, as Paul perceived, was the ultimate gospel. Men had been working with philosophies and rituals and legal systems—seeking to procure a "righteousness of their own." They had grown bitterly conscious of failure. They now craved for a higher impulse, an energy from above to help them ; and this was given in Christianity. Out of the endeavour to assert this truth the later theology arose. It made use of speculations, current in the thought of the age, which were certainly far removed from the gospel teaching. Jesus was regarded as in some essential sense a divine being. He was identified with the Logos, who in him became flesh and

thereby communicated to men that eternal life which he shared with God. It is not difficult to show that by adopting these conceptions the Church was led to formulate its message in a doctrinal system which in many respects obscured it. But the message itself was preserved, and could not, perhaps, have been preserved in any other way. In the forms most intelligible to the mind of the time the Church expressed its conviction that men now had access to a divine redemptive power. God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. This, in whatever forms it may be embodied, must always be the vital truth of Christianity.

It may be claimed, therefore, that in spite of the changes to which they were subjected the distinctive Christian ideas were fully maintained. Not only so, but in some ways they were made clearer. The Hellenistic movement, so far from substituting another gospel for that which had been received, brought a truer understanding of the purpose of Jesus. Historically it can hardly be questioned that this was its result. If the message was to exert its due influence on the Hellenistic world, a change in its form was necessary. It had to be translated out of the Jewish modes of thought and brought into harmony with Hellenistic ideas and religious sentiment. Otherwise it would have remained exotic and could never have made its world-wide appeal. But in other and more permanent aspects we can see that the new interpretation, so far from destroying the gospel, served rather to enrich and unfold it.

(1) For one thing, the Christian ideas were now set free from their purely Jewish connotation, and could be understood in their larger significance. The

Fourth Evangelist deliberately uses the new categories for this purpose. He takes the traditional beliefs one by one and interprets them in the light of Hellenistic thought, so as to disclose their larger intention. The Messiah becomes the incarnate Word, who reveals the Father and brings men into fellowship with Him. The Kingdom of God is taken out of the framework of Jewish apocalyptic, and represents that eternal life which is bestowed on men here and now through communion with Christ. The Judgment is not a dramatic event in the future but the separation of men in the present by their acceptance or rejection of the Light. The Spirit is no longer associated with strange phenomena and momentary experiences, but is an inward and abiding power, which witnesses to the truth of Christ's message and illuminates it in its full scope and meaning. Such interpretation of the earlier teaching cannot be put aside as arbitrary and fanciful. When Jesus spoke of the Kingdom he was indeed thinking of the new life in accordance with the will of God. When he declared himself Messiah he had more in his mind than the old conception of a national deliverer. He was conscious that through him a new order would set in, a new relation between God and man would be made possible. The Jewish conceptions under which the gospel was originally given were incapable of expressing its larger import. It needed to be brought into the light of those Hellenistic ideas which had behind them centuries of profound thinking on the ultimate problems. They helped to disclose those further meanings which were involved in the message of Jesus, and which constituted, in some respects, its very substance.

(2) Again, the principles of the gospel were now applied in a multitude of new directions; and here

we must look for one of the most signal services of Hellenistic thought. The view, indeed, is frequently put forward that all of those new interests which appear in later Christianity were simply a gift to it from Hellenism. Jesus had proclaimed a purely ethical message which happened, by a fortunate accident, to be taken up into the rich Hellenistic culture. As a result, it came to ally itself with philosophical thinking, with art and science, with the ordering of society and the state. This is certainly a misleading account of what happened. Jesus was not directly concerned with philosophy and art and social organisation, but he dealt with the central issues of life, and his gospel had therefore a real bearing on all human activities. One of the most important tasks that has always confronted the Church has been to extend the religion of Jesus to spheres which he himself never touched, but which none the less came within his aim. Paul recognised this when he addressed himself to the problems he encountered in the Greek cities For the solution of them he had no " word from the Lord," whose literal teaching was confined to life as he knew it in the villages of Galilee. Yet the rules which Paul lays down for the guidance of his converts under the new conditions are no mere accretions to the gospel. They spring, as every one must feel, out of its essence. Instead of darkening it, they help us to see more clearly into its inner purpose. So the Hellenistic thinkers took the new teaching and sought to discover what it meant for the complex civilisation of a great empire. In the performance of this task they borrowed countless suggestions from Greek philosophy, from Roman law and government, from the practices of social guilds, from the symbolism and ritual of other religions. All this was in one sense contributed from the Hellenistic side; but we have not to do with things merely added from without. The additions were consonant with the principles of the religion. They were necessary not only to fit it for the larger enterprise to which it was now committed, but to bring out its inherent nature. This is emphatically true of the most important of those apparently new elements which now entered Christianity. In Jesus' own teaching there is little or no evidence of a mystical strain, and it can be traced with practical certainty to the Hellenistic conception of God as the reality behind all existence. Yet the mystical idea, though it never comes to definite utterance, was implicit in the thought of Jesus. His belief in a moral fellowship with God presupposes that of a mystical fellowship. In obedience to God we find true life because all life has its source and fulfilment in God. With the aid of Hellenistic thought this truth, involved in the Christian message, was worked out to its deeper issues.

(3) Once more, it was of the utmost value to our religion that it did, in its contact with the Gentile world, undergo a change. This has usually been described as the beginning of disaster. Before the second century was over, men were conscious that the Church was growing worldly, that the glow and certainty had passed out of Christian faith. They imagined that everything would come back again if only the primitive conditions were restored. This was the dream of the Montanists, of the monastic orders in the ancient Church and the Middle Ages, of many erratic sects that have arisen from time to time in Protestantism. In our own day the demand for a return to the original teaching has been reinforced by the social enthusiasm of the age, and

the general aversion to dogmatic creeds; and it has found unexpected support from the conclusions of historical criticism. We are now learning, apparently, not only that there was a perversion of the true gospel, but how it came about. The Church, almost from the beginning, yielded to the insidious Hellenistic influence. It confused the message of Jesus with doctrines and superstitions which were quite alien to it, and what has passed for nineteen centuries under the name of Christianity has been at the best a composite religion. Our task is to free it of all those strange elements which were forced into it from Pagan sources, so that it will draw men again with an invincible power. Now it cannot be denied that after the first exalted days the Church fell short of its ideals, and it is always a satisfaction to discover a scapegoat for any failure. The victim that has been chosen in this instance is the Hellenistic movement, and especially its great representative, Paul. There are not a few who pretend to see in the advent of Paul the grand calamity to our religion. But the method of piling all blame on one particular head is always wrong, and is here foolish and absurd. If there was a decline in Christian faith and energy, it was not due to the Hellenistic movement or to Paul, its champion. The spiritual ardour of the first days could not, in the nature of things, be maintained. When the effort was made to apply the teaching of Jesus to the hard facts of the world's life there was bound to be failure—there was bound to be frequent compromise between lower and higher ideals. It was not to any theology or mode of worship but to the eternal difficulty of realising a lofty conception in the stubborn material of common life that we must attribute the shortcomings of the Church. And if it did, in spite of everything, achieve so much, the credit is chiefly due to that Hellenistic influence which changed the original message. Nothing so surely destroys the life of any movement as to cramp its free development. If it is to continue as it really is, it must be always changing. The spirit must keep itself alive by a constant renewal of the outward forms. For Christianity, above all other movements, the spirit was everything. It was not a ritual, or a code of ethics, or a doctrine, or a social or ecclesiastical system, but a living power. We hear of one sect in the early Church—that of the so-called Ebionites—which did attempt to adhere strictly to all the primitive forms. There is no sign that it preserved a higher level of zeal and faith than the Church of Paul and John. Indeed, it was just in this sect that Christian vitality seems to have been lowest. Its doctrines became ever narrower and more formal; it shrivelled into itself and clung to its obsolete position, until finally it disappeared. This was the inevitable result of striving to maintain the gospel precisely as it was at first. As Paul perceived, even the words of Jesus himself did not, in any absolute sense, contain his religion. They might freely be exchanged for others, given directly by the Spirit, if in this way the meaning of Jesus might be made more real. "The Kingdom of God is not in word but in power." By passing over into the Gentile world and clothing itself in the forms of Hellenistic thought the gospel indeed was changed; but only a superficial view can maintain that it thereby became something different. Its substance did not consist in the changing doctrines and observances but in the principles behind them. The change was necessary if these were to remain the same.

Here, then, we see the true significance of that process which was carried through in the first century, and which has so often been misunderstood. Christianity in the Gentile world underwent a transformation. From the religion and thought of the alien culture it borrowed so largely that it might seem almost to have forgotten its original message. But we can perceive, as we look deeper, that by means of all that it borrowed it was seeking to embody in more adequate forms what was truly its own. In all times since it has been a borrowing religion—assimilating to itself, as in the first century, the vital thought of each successive age. Its chief task, in our own day, is to make room in its teaching for the new scientific outlook, the new philosophies, the new social order. This does not mean that it is unfaithful to its past, but only that it is a living religion, capable of using what is given it from without for its own nourishment. For no other reason than that it has this capacity for endless borrowing, it is the absolute religion. Sometimes its claim to finality has been based on some fancied permanence in its doctrines; but these have always been changing, and if they could be fixed unalterably the result would only be utter sterility Our religion is the final because it is the living religion—renewing itself continually, absorbing fresh elements from every side into its own substance. So it has always done in the past, and there is no reason to doubt that this capacity will ever fail it.

Christianity has never ceased to borrow, and at the same time it remains creative. It does not receive passively what comes to it from without, but charges it with a new meaning. In the first century it thus took hold of the various movements in the Hellenistic world. Influences which at first seemed foreign to it were wrought into its message, and were found in the end to have helped it towards a larger development. In all later times the same process has repeated itself. When the barbarous races swept over the Roman Empire, when the modern world emerged from the Middle Ages, when science and criticism came to their own in the nineteenth century, it was feared that Christianity must perish along with the old order of which it seemed to be a part. But in each crisis it shook off the ancient forms in order to manifest itself in new ones. It won to its service the forces that threatened to destroy it, and made them instruments for the unfolding of its message. Thus it has ever been creating for itself a new body. When we compare it as it is now with what it was at the beginning it appears completely changed. There seems to be truth in the contention that it is no longer the religion of Jesus but a new religion, made up of contributions from unnumbered sources in the course of two thousand years. But there has always been something that was inherent in itself. All that it has borrowed has been transformed and quickened by this revelation, given once for all through Jesus Christ.

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THE KERR LECTURESHIP

THE "KERR LECTURESHIP" was founded by the TRUSTEES of the late Miss JOAN KERR of Sanquhar, under her Deed of Settlement, and formally adopted by the United Presbyterian Synod in May 1886. In the following year, May 1887, the provisions and conditions of the Lectureship, as finally adjusted, were adopted by the Synod, and embodied in a Memorandum, printed in the Appendix to the Synod Minutes, p. 489.

On the union of the United Presbyterian Church with the Free Church of Scotland in October 1900, the necessary changes were made in the designation of the object of the Lectureship and the persons eligible for appointment to it, so as to suit the altered circumstances. And at the General Assembly of 1901 it was agreed that the Lectureship should in future be connected with the Glasgow College of the United Free Church. From the Memorandum, as thus amended, the following excerpts are here given :—

II. The amount to be invested shall be £3000.

III. The object of the Lectureship is the promotion of the Study of Scientific Theology in the United Free Church of Scotland.

The Lectures shall be upon some such subjects as the following, viz. :

A. Historic Theology—
  (1) Biblical Theology, (2) History of Doctrine, (3) Patristics, with special reference to the significance and authority of the first three centuries.

B. Systematic Theology—
  (1) Christian Doctrine—(*a*) Philosophy of Religion, (*b*) Comparative Theology, (*c*) Anthropology, (*d*) Christology, (*e*) Soteriology, (*f*) Eschatology.
  (2) Christian Ethics—(*a*) Doctrine of Sin, (*b*) Individual and Social Ethics, (*c*) The Sacraments, (*d*) The Place of Art in Religious Life and Worship.

Further, the Committee of Selection shall, from time to time, as they think fit, appoint as the subject of the Lectures any important Phases of Modern Religious Thought or Scientific Theories in their bearing upon Evangelical Theology. The Committee may also appoint a subject connected with the practical work of the Ministry as subject of Lecture, but in no case shall this be admissible more than once in every five appointments.

IV. The appointments to this Lectureship shall be made in the first instance from among the Licentiates or Ministers of the United Free Church of Scotland, of whom no one shall be eligible who, when the appointment falls to be made, shall have been licensed for more than twenty-five years, and who is not a graduate of a British University, preferential regard being had to those who have for some time been connected with a Continental University.

V. Appointments to this Lectureship not subject to the conditions in Section IV. may also from time to time, at the discretion of the Committee, be made from among eminent members of the Ministry of any of the Nonconformist Churches of Great Britain and Ireland, America, and the Colonies, or of the Protestant Evangelical Churches of the Continent.

VI. The Lecturer shall hold the appointment for three years.

VII. The number of Lectures to be delivered shall be left to the discretion of the Lecturer, except thus far, that in no case shall there be more than twelve or less than eight.

VIII. The Lectures shall be published at the Lecturer's own expense within one year after their delivery.

IX. The Lectures shall be delivered to the students of the Glasgow College of the United Free Church of Scotland.

XII. The Public shall be admitted to the Lectures.

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